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The War of the Flea

*A Study of Guerrilla Warfare
Theory and Practice*

The Citadel Press, New York

1 The wind of revolution. Popular will as the key to strategy. The confrontation of the haves and the have-nots. Fallacies of counter-insurgency. Guerrilla war as an extension of politics. Cracks in the armour of the modern state.

'They just lured us through a trap-door, closed it on our behinds, and let us have it,' [U.S. Army Lt. William Richter] later explained [an ambush in which 51 South Vietnamese Rangers were killed]. 'We were caught flat-footed and cut to pieces.'

'The same damn story,' a senior U.S. officer in Saigon grumbled. Different only in detail or degree, similar stories unfold week after week in South Vietnam. Posts are raided, officials assassinated, hamlets burned, towns assaulted. And they all add up to one gloomy conclusion: despite inferior fire power and strength, the communists are beating a South Vietnamese force of more than 400,000 soldiers backed up by 17,000 American advisors and nearly two million dollars a day in U.S. aid.

Stanley Karnow, 'This is Our Enemy'
Saturday Evening Post, 22 August 1964

Nationwide, the pacification program is at a standstill, and Viet Cong roam freely in areas once classed as secure... Even if another 40,000 to 50,000 troops were added to the 525,000 already planned, the U.S. still wouldn't have enough to dominate all of the South Vietnamese countryside, some military analysts claim.

A tough, veteran U.S. official working in a typical province in the Mekong Delta estimates it would take a full U.S. division (about 15,000 men) eight months to find and destroy the fewer than 4,000 Viet Cong thought to be operating there. Right now there is less than one full U.S. division to help police all 16 heavily populated provinces in the Delta. To do a proper job all over the country, this official thinks a million U.S. troops would be needed.

Wall Street Journal,
8 March 1968

The excerpts above have been taken from typical reports nearly four years apart, the first in 1964, the second in 1968. The years pass, the investment in men and dollars mounts, but nothing changes, except the scale of the incredible destruction. The 'nearly two million dollars a day' of the 1964 report had become,

by 1968, more than *three million an hour*. The 17,000 'advisers' had become more than half a million regular troops, with still more on the way. But journalists and military men, staring into the face of certain defeat, continued to talk about what it might take to 'do a proper job' in Vietnam.

NIXON SAYS WAR HURTS ECONOMY... DEFENCE PROFITS TOO HIGH, CONGRESS IS TOLD... With each new crisis bringing a spate of headlines, reports, analyses, reappraisals, the American war in South-east Asia seemed likely to stand as the best-documented defeat in history. The nature of the dilemma confronting the United States in 1968, unchanged from the very inception of the war, was still only dimly perceived. Theodore Sorenson, adviser and aide to the assassinated President John F. Kennedy, defined it better than most when he likened the U.S. position to 'a six-sided box that we did not intend to make and cannot seem to break'. He described the 'six sides' in three sentences:

Our worldwide military primacy cannot produce a victory, and our worldwide political primacy cannot permit a withdrawal. We are unable to transfer our will to the South Vietnamese and unable to break the will of the North Vietnamese. (Read: Viet Cong.)

Any serious escalation would risk Chinese or Soviet intervention, and any serious negotiations would risk a Communist South Vietnam.*

That the United States was deep in a military-political morass had long been clear. '... this cruel and ugly war that nobody wants,' lamented the *New York Times*; and from *Newsweek*: 'Only the chronic optimist can now see the "light at the end of the tunnel"' that used to illustrate the rhetoric of the military briefing officers.'

What continued to be lacking was any understanding of the *significance* of the defeat, of the true nature of its causes, and of the situation and strategy that had brought it about. Military and political analysts could continue to speak knowledgeably of the necessity of destroying the Viet Cong 'infrastructure' and of instilling in the South Vietnamese people 'the will to fight', a prescription relevant only to the Washington myth of a nation being somehow 'taken over' by aliens.

Unacknowledged, or perhaps not even understood, was the simple fact that the American adventure in South-east Asia had been *foredoomed*. And this is to say, condemned from the start by two principal factors that no insight or effect could remedy:

* *New York Times*, 4 March 1968.

1. Inherent contradictions – between stated U.S. war aims and actual goals, between necessary means and desired ends, between domestic political and economic realities and the international posture and ambitions of the United States (and these are to name only a few of the more obvious conflicts).

2. By an opposing strategy based on the exploitation of such contradictions, and by the existence of a strong and experienced adversary, ideally positioned to exploit them.

Analysis of the debacle brings us to a single central figure: not invaders, not armies, not the alien hordes of the State Department's imagination, but simply – the *guerrilla fighter*. When we discuss Vietnam we are studying the latest and most complete and detailed text existent on *la guerra de guerrillas*, the war of small bands, fought by Spanish partisans against Napoleon's invading armies, refined in our time to a politico-military science – part Marxist-Leninist social theory, part tactical innovation – that is changing the power relationships of the world we live in, and in the process has forced the professional military everywhere to revise their most fundamental concepts of the very nature of war.

Guerrilla war, *the strategy of contradictions*, has become the political phenomenon of the twentieth century, the visible wind of revolution, stirring hope and fear on three continents. At this writing, it is being waged in a score of countries, from Angola to Iraq and from Thailand to the Colombian and Guatemalan highlands. With the American involvement in Vietnam, it became the first concern of the Pentagon, the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Council, the White House. Yet little has been learned about it save that, in Mao's phrase, 'one spark can start a prairie fire'. The lesson of Cuba led to prompt military intervention in Santo Domingo: a stitch in time, but would it hold? Guerrilla war was strangled in its infancy and Che Guevara murdered there; but did he die? Fresh sparks are glowing, and Che dead proves even more potent than Che alive, a heroic figure giving vitality to unconquerable ideas, raising banners of insurrection even in the western capitals, where his portrait is lifted with the red and the black, behind him marching the cadres of the guerrilla wars to come. Fire-blackened cities showed that the United States itself, heartland of empire, is not immune. Yesterday military aircraft were bombing the slums of Saigon: tomorrow it could be Harlem, Newark, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Watts.

In the world at large guerrilla war is destroying the last vestiges of feudalism and of the old colonialism, liberating the masses of

the poor from the oppression of the privileged landowning and mercantile classes, from the oligarchies and the military juntas. Its full vigour now is turned against the new imperialism – the economic, political and military domination of the weak, industrially backward nations by the rich, the powerful, the technologically advanced, the grand alliance of industrial wealth and military might over which the United States of America holds hegemony.

Viewed from one standpoint, it is a potent weapon, a sword of national liberation and social justice; viewed from another, it is a subversive and sinister process, a plague of dragon's teeth, sown in confusion, nourished in the soil of social dissension, economic disruption, and political chaos, causing armed fanatics to spring up where peaceful peasants toiled.

In its total effect, it is creating new alignments and a new confrontation of powers that vitally relates to and yet transcends the Cold War. It is a confrontation, in its essence, of the world's *haves* and the world's *have-nots*, of the rich nations and the poor nations.

It is reshaping the world that we have known, and its outcome may well decide the form and substance of the foreseeable future, not only in the present theatres of war, which are vast and shadowy, but everywhere.

The questions then arise: What is it? What can be done about it – or with it? How to end it or to exploit it? Is it something that can be turned off and on at will, as an instrument of national policy or political expedience?

On the available evidence, most of it concentrated in a span of twenty years or so of what may be called the post-colonial period, a definition offers itself that will, in turn, suggest answers to other questions.

Guerrilla war, in the larger sense in which we have been discussing it, is *revolutionary* war, engaging a civilian population, or a significant part of such a population, against the military forces of established or usurpative governmental authority.

The circumstances may vary. In one instance – Israel and Algeria serve as examples – the authority may be alien, that is, colonial, and its opposition virtually the entire native population, led by a vanguard of militants.

In another set of circumstances – Cuba, for example – the authority may be a native, at least nominally independent government, and the insurgency initiated by a small faction, challenging the policies or legitimacy of the regime.

Again cases vary. The war of the Viet Cong was both ideological and intensely nationalistic. Led by communists, it appealed not

only to the poor and exploited but also to a broad popular front made up of those who, regardless of class origin or interest, were unwilling longer to suffer foreign occupation or to accept the cruelty and corruption of military puppets installed by the foreigner. Social and ideological motives were only part of the picture. Patriotism (as the Americans would call it if speaking of themselves in a similar situation) played a large part. For a multitude of Vietnamese the war was simply the continuation of that earlier struggle against French colonialism, Americans replacing *légionnaires* and North African mercenaries in a twenty-year campaign of pillage and murder, calling it a crusade for liberty and democracy.

Where the war in South Vietnam has ideological and nationalistic roots, the revolution in Cuba had none that were visible. It began, rather, as the idealistic protest of a tiny faction of uncertain political orientation – vaguely ‘liberal’, vaguely socialistic, tinged with Spanish anarchism – against the corruption and oppression of the Batista regime. Class rivalries were not evident. Nationalism was not an apparent factor. The clash with foreign and feudal interests, the anti-Americanism, the militant proletarianism and Marxist slogans of the Cuban revolution were later developments, following rather than leading to the overthrow of Batista.

In Morocco (1952–6), the nationalists of the Istiqlal built their cause around the symbolic figure of the exiled sultan, Mohammed Sidi ben Yusef, and forced the abdication of the pretender and the dissolution of the French protectorate. In Israel powerful religious and ethnic drives gave the struggle for the Jewish national homeland the character of a holy war.

But ostensible causes can be misleading. Patriotism, race, religion, the cry for social justice: beneath all of these symbolic and abstract ‘causes’ that have inspired the revolutions of this century, one discovers a unifying principle, a common mainspring.

It is a revolutionary *impulse*, an upsurge of popular *will*, that really has very little to do with questions of national or ethnic identity, or self-determination, or forms of government, or social justice, the familiar shibboleths of political insurgency. It is not even certain that economic deprivation in itself is the decisive factor that it is widely assumed to be. Poverty and oppression are, after all, conditions of life on the planet that have been endured by countless generations with scarcely a murmur.

The *will to revolt*, so widespread as to be almost universal today, seems to be something more than a reaction to political circumstances or material conditions. What it seems to express is a

newly awakened consciousness, not of ‘causes’ but of *potentiality*. It is a spreading awareness of the possibilities of human existence, coupled with a growing sense of the *causal* nature of the universe, that together inspire, first in individuals, then in communities and entire nations, *an entirely new attitude towards life*.

The effect of this sudden awareness, this sudden fruition of consciousness, is to produce in the so-called backward areas of the world, all at once, a pervasive and urgent desire for radical change, based on the new insight, startling in its simplicity, that the conditions of life that had seemed immutable *can*, after all, be changed.

Limitations that were formerly accepted all at once become intolerable. The hint of imminent change suggests opportunities that had not been glimpsed until now. The *will to act* is born. It is as though people everywhere were saying: *Look, here is something we can do, or have, or be, simply by acting. Then what have we been waiting for? Let us act!*

This, at any rate, describes the state of mind of the modern insurgent, the guerrilla fighter, whatever his slogans or his cause; and his secret weapon, above and beyond any question of strategy or tactics or techniques of irregular warfare, is nothing more than *the ability to inspire this state of mind in others*. The defeat of the military enemy, the overthrow of the government, are secondary tasks, in the sense that they come later. The primary effort of the guerrilla is to militate the population, without whose consent no government can stand for a day.

The guerrilla is subversive of the existing order in that he is the disseminator of revolutionary ideas; his actions lend force to his doctrine and show the way to radical change. Yet it would be an error to consider him as a being apart from the seed bed of revolution. He himself is created by the political climate in which revolution becomes possible, and is himself as much an expression as he is a catalyst of the popular will towards such change.

To understand this much is to avoid two great pitfalls, two serious areas of confusion, into which counter-insurgency specialists seem to fall.

One such pitfall is the *conspiracy theory*: the view that revolution is the (usually deformed) offspring of a process of artificial insemination, and that the guerrilla nucleus (the fertilizing agent, so to speak) is made up of outsiders, conspirators, political zombies – in other words, actual or spiritual aliens – who somehow stand separate from their social environment, while manipulating it to obscure and sinister ends.

The other is the *methods fallacy*, held – at least until very recently – by most American military men: the old-fashioned notion that guerrilla warfare is largely a matter of tactics and techniques, to be adopted by almost anyone who may have need of them, in almost any irregular warfare situation.

The first view is both naïve and cynical. Invariably expressed in the rhetoric of Western liberalism and urging political democracy (that is to say, multi-party elections) as the *desideratum*, it nevertheless lacks confidence in popular decisions; it tacitly assumes that people in the mass are simpletons, too ignorant, unsophisticated, and passive to think for themselves or to have either the will or the capacity to wage a revolutionary war.

Ergo, the revolution which in fact exists must be due to the machinations of interlopers. The guerrillas must be the dupes or the wily agents of an *alien* power or, at least, of an *alien* political philosophy.*

On the more naïve level, it seems to be assumed that people would scarcely choose the revolutionary path of their own accord; certainly not if the revolution in question were out of joint with the political traditions and ideals held dear by Americans. To quote former President Eisenhower in this connexion, relative to the war in South Vietnam:

'We must inform these people [the South Vietnamese] of what is happening and how important it is to them to get on our side. Then they will want to choose victory.'†

Alas! the victory they seem to have chosen is not General Eisenhower's.

Most American foreign policy makers and experts of the new politico-military science of counter-insurgency (the theory and practice of counter-revolution) appear more cynical than General Eisenhower. It is manifest in their pronouncements that all modern revolutions are, or are likely to become, struggles between two world 'systems', the communist on one side, the Americans and their allies on the other, with the people most directly involved merely pawns, to be manipulated by one side or the other.

* But what can this strange American word, 'alien', mean to the Vietnamese to the Cubans, to the Congolese? Could it mean – shocking thought! – *American*?

† In a Republican political forum in Philadelphia, urging an 'intensive propaganda campaign' to create a clear unity of view between the South Vietnamese people and the United States'; quoted in the *New York Times*, 16 June 1964.

Since it is the United States that is, more often than not in this era, the interloper in almost any revolutionary situation that comes to mind (Vietnam, Cuba, Iran, Guatemala, Brazil, Congo, Venezuela, to name a few), it is not surprising that the Cold War psychology should lead us to look for our Russian or Chinese counterpart in the given area of contention, and, finding him, or thinking so, to assign to him a major role. To do so, however, is to succumb to a curious illogic, in which our powers of observation seem to fail us.

Can guerrilla tactics be employed successfully against guerrillas? The answer is negative. To suppose otherwise is to fall into the *methods fallacy*. Indian fighters do not become Indians by taking scalps. A spotted jungle suit does not make a United States marine a guerrilla.

The experience of the Second World War and of every conflict since then has made it clear that commando troops are not guerrillas. Nor can the so-called 'counter-insurgency' forces now being developed in a more sophisticated school be considered guerrillas, although they may employ some of the more obvious techniques of the guerrilla fighter – the night raid, the ambush, the roving patrol far from a military base, and so on.

Such techniques are as old as warfare itself. It is possible to conceive of their use by Cro-Magnon man, whoever *he* was, against the last of the Neanderthals; they were employed by the aboriginal Britons against Caesar's legionnaires, and they are the techniques of savages in the Colombian jungle and no doubt of a few surviving New Guinean headhunters to this day.

Headhunters are not guerrillas. The distinction is simple enough. When we speak of the guerrilla fighter we are speaking of the *political partisan*, an armed civilian whose principal weapon is not his rifle or his machete but his relationship to the community, the nation, in and for which he fights.

Insurgency, or guerrilla war, is the agency of radical social or political change; it is the face and the right arm of revolution. Counter-insurgency is a form of counter-revolution, the process by which revolution is resisted. The two are opposite sides of the coin, and it will not do to confuse them or their agents, despite superficial similarities.

Because of the political nature of the struggle, the disparity of the means at the disposal of the two forces, and, above all, the total opposition of their strategic aims, the most fundamental tactics of the guerrilla simply are not available to the army that opposes him,

and are available only in the most limited way to the counter-insurgency specialist, the United States Special Forces officer, let us say, who may try to imitate him.

The reasons are clear.

First, the guerrilla has the initiative; it is he who begins the war, and he who decides when and where to strike. His military opponent must wait, and while waiting, he must be on guard *everywhere*.

Both before and after the war has begun, the government army is in a *defensive* position, by reason of its role as policeman, which is to say, as the guardian of public and private property.

The military has extensive holdings to protect: cities, towns, villages, agricultural lands, communications, commerce, and usually some sort of industrial base to defend. There is also the purely military investment to consider: garrisons, outposts, supply lines, convoys, airfields, the troops themselves and their valuable weapons, which it will be the first tactical objective of the guerrillas to capture, so as to arm more guerrillas. Finally, there is a political system, already under severe strain if the point of open insurrection has been reached, to be preserved and strengthened.

In all of these areas, the incumbent regime and its military arm present highly vulnerable targets to an enemy who is himself as elusive and insubstantial as the wind.

For, while the army suffers from an embarrassment of wealth, and especially of expensive military hardware for which there is no employment, the guerrilla has the freedom of his poverty. He owns nothing but his rifle and the shirt on his back, has nothing to defend but his existence. He holds no territory, has no expensive and cumbersome military establishment to maintain, no tanks to risk in battle, no garrisons subject to siege, no transport vulnerable to air attack nor aircraft of his own to be shot down, no massed divisions to be bombarded, no motor columns to be ambushed, no bases or depots that he cannot abandon within the hour.

He can afford to run when he cannot stand and fight with good assurance of winning, and to disperse and hide when it is not safe to move. In the extremity, he can always sink back into the peaceful population – that sea, to use Mao Tse-tung's well-worn metaphor, in which the guerrilla swims like a fish.

The population, as should be clear by now, is the key to the entire struggle. Indeed, although Western analysts seem to dislike entertaining this idea, it is the population which is doing the struggling. The guerrilla, who is of the people in a way which the government soldier cannot be (for if the regime were not alienated

from the people, whence the revolution?), fights with the support of the non-combatant civilian populace: it is his camouflage, his quartermaster, his recruiting office, his communications network, and his efficient, all-seeing intelligence service.

Without the consent and active aid of the people, the guerrilla would be merely a bandit, and could not long survive. If, on the other hand, the counter-insurgent could claim this same support, the guerrilla would not exist, because there would be no war, no revolution. The cause would have evaporated, the popular impulse towards radical change – cause or no cause – would be dead.

Here again we come to the vital question of *aims*, on which the strategy and tactics of both sides are necessarily based.

The guerrilla fighter is primarily a propagandist, an agitator, a disseminator of the revolutionary idea, who uses the struggle itself – the actual physical conflict – as an instrument of agitation. His primary goal is to raise the level of revolutionary anticipation, and then of popular participation, to the crisis point at which the revolution becomes general throughout the country and the people in their masses carry out the final task – the destruction of the existing order and (often but not always) of the army that defends it.

By contrast, the purpose of the counter-revolutionary is negative and defensive. It is to restore order, to protect property, to preserve existing forms and interests by force of arms, *where persuasion has already failed*. His means may be political in so far as they involve the use of still more persuasion – the promise of social and economic reforms, bribes of a more localized sort, counter-propaganda of various kinds. But primarily the counter-insurgent's task must be *to destroy the revolution by destroying its promise* – that means by proving, militarily, that it cannot and will not succeed.

To do so will require the total defeat of the revolutionary vanguard and its piecemeal destruction wherever it exists. The alternatives will be to abdicate the military effort in favour of a political solution – for example, the partition of Vietnam after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, the Algerian solution, etc.; in other words, compromise or complete surrender.

That military victory against true guerrillas is possible seems doubtful on the basis of modern experience, barring the use of methods approaching genocide, as applied notably by the Germans in certain occupied countries during the Second World War.

The counter-insurgent cannot win by imitating the insurgent, because he is the alien in the revolutionary situation, and because his tasks are precisely the opposite of those of the guerrilla, where

symmetry exists at all. The guerrilla's mere survival is a political victory: it encourages and raises the popular opposition to the incumbent regime. Thus he can afford to run and to hide. The counter-insurgent gains nothing by running and hiding. He surrenders everything. The guerrilla can disguise himself as – in fact he can be – a peaceful agrarian worker, and still spread his revolutionary message. In a similar role, the counter-insurgent would be merely a police spy, and would accomplish little, spread no message. The guerrilla can hit and run. Every successful raid gives him more arms and ammunition, and more favourable publicity. The counter-insurgent can gain nothing by such Red Indian tactics – even if similar targets were available to him – and they are not. His military campaign must be sweeping, continuous, and cumulative in its effects. Either he clears the country of guerrillas or he does not. If he does not, he continues to lose.

The distinction made here between guerrilla war as a politico-military technique and mere guerrilla-ism (banditry, on the one hand, or the application of irregular warfare techniques by regular military organizations, on the other) is by no means as arbitrary as it may at first appear.

Popular insurrections have occurred throughout history. They have usually failed, or in any case have produced only limited victories, because the techniques they can exploit today were then irrelevant to the historical situation. This is simply another way of saying that, until now, the popular majorities, the labouring, unspecialized masses of pre-industrial societies, were able to exert very little political or economic leverage.

The serfs of the medieval period, for example, were unable to resist the feudal military power not merely because they lacked arms and skills, political consciousness, and cohesion, but because they had no other means to affect the political and economic processes of their world.

Economically, they were manageable because they lived too close to the level of bare subsistence to be otherwise. They could not even think of withholding their labour – their only economic lever. Isolated by their brute condition and their ignorance, they lived below the level of politics. If they starved, or rebelled and were slaughtered, *there was no one to care*, no economically or politically potent class to whom it would make the slightest difference.

Subsequent revolutions, from the Renaissance to the Russian Revolution and not excluding Mexico, 1910–17, have been bourgeois in character, or have quickly been converted into bourgeois movements, after an initially populist period. *Liberté, égalité,*

fraternité applied only to the great and petite bourgeoisie of France, after a brief Jacobin interval (significantly, all bourgeois historians loathe and fear the proletarianism of the Terror), because, in the end, only the bourgeoisie had the lever – wealth and the tools of production – to assume leadership in a confrontation with the landowning feudal aristocracy. Although there was now some class mobility and a greater need of democratic slogans, the landless, unspecialized masses remained submerged. They could remain idle and starve. All the better. It reduced beggary and banditry. Isolated, they could be slaughtered and *no one would care*.

History brings us to a pass in which (for a variety of reasons but principally because of the complexity of the productive processes, the fragmentation, specialization, and interlocking nature of the industrial society, and the importance of disciplined labour and huge consumer markets, relative to the profit system) the labouring masses assume political potency. Their new role in the industrial society – as producer, as distributor, as consumer – gives them a lever. If they withhold their work the economy collapses. If they cease to buy and to consume the same thing happens. If they are slaughtered there are worldwide repercussions, based, in the final analysis, on economic considerations.

The modern industrial society cannot function, and its government cannot govern, except with popular participation and by popular consent. What is true of the industrial states is also true, with minor qualification, of the non-industrial states and colonies on which the former depend for the raw materials of their industry and, often, for their export markets.

For the best of economic reasons, modern governments must seem to be popular. They must make great concessions to popular notions of what is democratic and just, or be replaced by regimes that will do so. The governments of the dominant industrial states themselves, even more than those they dominate, are strapped politically by this factor of the domestic 'image'. They must use the liberal rhetoric and also pay something in the way of social compromise – schools, hospitals, decent concern for the well-being of all but the most isolated poor – if they are to retain power and keep the people to their accustomed, profit-producing tasks.

This fact makes such governments extremely vulnerable to a sort of war – guerrilla war with its psychological and economic weapons – that their predecessors could have ignored, had such a war been possible at all in the past.

They are vulnerable because they must, at all cost, keep the economy functioning and showing a profit or providing the

materials and markets on which another, dominant economy depends. Again, they are vulnerable because they must maintain the appearance of normalcy; they can be *embarrassed* out of office. And they are triply vulnerable because they cannot be as ruthless as the situation demands. They cannot openly crush the opposition that embarrasses and harasses them. They must be wooers as well as doers.

These are modern weaknesses. They invite a distinctly modern development to exploit them, and that development is modern guerrilla warfare. The weaknesses peculiar to the modern, bourgeois-democratic, capitalistic state (but shared in some measure by all modern states) make popular war possible, and give it its distinctive forms, which clearly cannot be imitated, except in the most superficial way, by the armies of the state itself.

Fundamentally, the guerrilla's tactics and those of the counter-insurgent differ because their roles differ. They are dissimilar forces, fighting dissimilar wars, for disparate objectives. The counter-insurgent seeks a military solution: to wipe out the guerrillas. He is hampered by a political and economic impediment: he cannot wipe out the populace, or any significant sector of it. The guerrilla, for his part, wishes to wear down his military opponent and will employ suitable tactics to that end, but his primary objective is political. It is to feed and fan the fires of revolution by his struggle, to raise the entire population against the regime, to discredit it, isolate it, wreck its credit, undermine its economy, over-extend its resources, and cause its disintegration.

Essentially, then, the guerrilla fighter's war is political and social, his means are at least as political as they are military, his purpose is almost entirely so. Thus we may paraphrase Clausewitz: *Guerrilla war is the extension of politics by means of armed conflict*. At a certain point in its development it becomes revolution itself – the dragon's teeth sprung to maturity.

Guerrilla war = revolutionary war: the extension of politics by means of armed conflict.

Until this much is properly understood by those who would oppose it, nothing else about it can be understood and no strategy or tactics devised to suppress it can prevail.

If, on the other hand, this much is understood by those who lead it, then it can scarcely fail in any circumstance – for the war will not even begin until all the conditions of its success are present.

Let us now begin to examine the mechanics of the revolutionary process called guerrilla warfare.

2 The war of the flea. Political and military objectives. Creating 'the climate of collapse'. Organization of insurgent forces. Guevara on guerrilla war: the base.

The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue.

Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung

What Mao Tse-tung says of guerrilla tactics here is a key to communist thinking; it can be discerned in diplomacy as well as in war. The Soviet policy makers have mastered the Chinese lesson very well, and apply it to a wide variety of problems having nothing to do with guerrilla fighting. Berlin since the Second World War has been a prime example, and the establishment of Soviet missile bases in Cuba was another.

But then, why not? The policy of hitting the enemy when he is weak, evading him when he is strong, taking the offensive when he falls back, circling around when he advances – all of this is only common sense. There is no great novelty in it, nor can the Marxist-Leninist camp claim any special credit for it.

What is new – and Mao is the apostle and the long Chinese revolution the first proving ground – is the application of guerrilla activity, in a conscious and deliberate way, to specific political objectives, without immediate reference to the outcome of battles as such, provided only that the revolutionaries survive.

Oddly enough, however, it is the non-communist Cubans rather than the Chinese who have provided the most clear-cut example of military activity producing political effects, in a war in which few of the battles would be described by military men as more than skirmishes, yet one in which the government came crashing down as surely as if an army had been destroyed on the battlefield.

The explanation seems to baffle military men, yet it is simple enough. Guerrillas who know their trade and have popular support cannot be eliminated by the means available to most governments. And on the other hand, few governments can stand the political, psychological, and economic stresses of guerrilla war, no matter how strong they may be militarily.

In general, all warfare involves the same basic problem: how to use one's strength to exploit the enemy's weaknesses and so to overcome him. In an internal war the government's strength is its

powerful army, its arsenal, and its wealth of material means. Its weaknesses are social, political, and economic in the sense that the economy, while an asset, is vulnerable from several points of view. It provides both military and psychological targets.

Constitutional democracies, as I have already noted, are particularly exposed to the subversion that is the basic weapon of revolutionary war. The stratified class structure and the multi-party political systems of most such countries are sources of political and social dissension that can be exploited. Constitutional law is a further embarrassment, and sometimes may be a fatal impediment.

Fulgencio Batista fell not because he was a dictator but because his situation in a country with democratic institutions – moreover, a country almost entirely dependent on the favour of the United States with its similar institutions and traditions – did not permit him to be dictator *enough* to resolve the contradictions that confronted him. His hands were tied by conventions he could not break without losing his foreign support. His use of counter-terrorism, that is, the *illegal* use of force, only increased his domestic opposition. Yet without it, he had no effective means to combat the disorder and subversion that threatened his regime. Similarly, the French in Indo-China were destroyed, in the final analysis, by the very ideas and institutions that they themselves had introduced. Franco, by way of contrast, probably stands because he has successfully stifled the very idea of political liberty in Spain, while putting enough bread on the table to satisfy the vocal majority.

This is to speak of legalistic – that is, social and political – difficulties.

On the military level, a regular army, under whatever political system, has disadvantages that are owing to the very size and complexity of the organization, and again to its defensive role, as the guardian of the national wealth and of the whole of the national territory.

The guerrilla, for his part, finds his strength in his freedom from territorial commitments, his mobility, and his relationship to a discontented people, as the spokesman of their grievances, the armed vanguard, as Che Guevara puts it, of militant social protest.

His weakness is merely – I use the word advisedly – a *military* weakness. He lacks the arms, and usually the manpower, to risk a military decision.

In the circumstances it is obvious what the guerrilla's tactics must be.

Politically, he must seek to aggravate such social and political dissension as exists and to raise the level of political consciousness

and of revolutionary *will* among the people. It will also be part of his design, as well as the natural consequence of his actions, to bring about an intensification of the political regression that already exists, so deepening popular opposition to the regime and hastening the process of its dissolution.

Militarily, his tactics will be designed to wear the enemy down, by chipping away at the morale of the government troops and by inducing the maximum expenditure of funds, material, and manpower in the effort to suppress him. At the same time he will endeavour to build his own forces through the capture of government arms and by recruitment from an increasingly alienated populace, avoiding a military confrontation until the day – and it will come late – when an equalization of forces has been obtained.

An army deals from strength, seeking out the enemy's weaknesses in order to destroy him. The guerrilla is sometimes said to deal from weakness, but this is an absurdity. In fact, he exploits his own kind of strength, which lies in the extreme mobility of lightly armed forces without territorial or hardware investments, a bottomless well of manpower from which to recruit, and the fact that *time* – which is both money and political capital – works in his favour.

Analogically, the guerrilla fights the war of the flea, and his military enemy suffers the dog's disadvantages: too much to defend; too small, ubiquitous, and agile an enemy to come to grips with. If the war continues long enough – this is the theory – the dog succumbs to exhaustion and anaemia without ever having found anything on which to close his jaws or to rake with his claws.

But this may be to oversimplify for the sake of an analogy. In practice, the dog does not die of anaemia. He merely becomes too weakened – in military terms, over-extended; in political terms, too unpopular; in economic terms, too expensive – to defend himself. At this point, the flea, having multiplied to a veritable plague of fleas through long series of small victories, each drawing its drop of blood, each claiming the reward of a few more captured weapons to arm yet a few more partisans, concentrates his forces for a decisive series of powerful blows.

Time works for the guerrilla both in the field – where it costs the enemy a daily fortune to pursue him – and in the politico-economic arena.

Almost all modern governments are highly conscious of what journalism calls 'world opinion'. For sound reasons, mostly of an economic nature, they cannot afford to be condemned in the

United Nations, they do not like to be visited by Human Rights Commissions or Freedom of the Press Committees; their need of foreign investment, foreign loans, foreign markets, satisfactory trade relationships, and so on requires that they be members in more or less good standing of a larger community of interests. Often, too, they are members of military alliances. Consequently, they must maintain some appearance of stability, in order to assure the other members of the community or of the alliance that contracts will continue to be honoured, that treaties will be upheld, that loans will be repaid with interest, that investments will continue to produce profits and be safe.

Protracted internal war threatens all of this, for no investor will wish to put his money where it is not safe and certain to produce a profit, no bank lends without guarantees, no ally wishes to treat with a government that is on the point of eviction.

It follows that it must be the business of the guerrilla, and of his clandestine political organization in the cities, to destroy the stable image of the government, and so to deny it credits, to dry up its sources of revenue, and to create dissension within the frightened owning classes, within the government bureaucracy (whose payrolls will be pinched), and within the military itself.

The outbreak of the insurgency is the first step – it is a body blow that in itself inflicts severe damage on the prestige of the regime. The survival of the guerrilla force over a period of time, demonstrating the impotence of the army, continues the process. As the guerrilla's support widens – and this will come automatically as the weakness of the government is revealed – political trouble is sure to follow, in the form of petitions, demonstrations, strikes. These in their turn will be followed by more serious developments – sabotage, terror, spreading insurrection.

In such circumstances it will be a remarkable government that will not be driven to stern repressive measures – curfews, the suspension of civil liberties, a ban on popular assembly, illegal acts that can only deepen the popular opposition, creating a vicious circle of rebellion and repression until the economy is undermined, the social fabric torn beyond redemption, and the regime tottering on the verge of collapse.

In the end, it will be a question whether the government falls before the military is destroyed in the field or whether the destruction of the military brings about the final deposition of the political regime. The two processes are complementary. Social and political dissolution bleeds the military, and the protracted and futile campaign in the field contributes to the process of social

and political dissolution, creating what I have elsewhere called 'the climate of collapse'.

This is the grand strategic objective of the guerrilla: to create the 'climate of collapse'. It may be taken as the key to everything he does.

Please note, I do not by any means wish to suggest that the train of events described above can be put into motion anywhere, at any time, by any agency, irrespective of objective and subjective conditions. Insurrections may be provoked or incited or may occur spontaneously as the expression of grievances or of frustrated aspirations or because of other factors: religious frenzy, blood feuds, mass hysteria induced by anything from a sports contest to a rape in Mississippi can lead to bloodshed and temporary anarchy. Guerrilla warfare does not necessarily follow. Insurrection is a phenomenon, revolution a process, which cannot begin until the historical stage has been set for it.

Since guerrilla war is, in our definition, a revolutionary process, it can only come out of a revolutionary situation. For this reason, I am inclined to agree with Che Guevara when he writes in *Guerrilla Warfare*:

Naturally, it is not to be thought that all conditions for revolution are going to be created through the impulse given to them by guerrilla activity. It must always be kept in mind that there is a necessary minimum without which the establishment and consolidation of the first centre [of rebellion] is not practicable. People must see clearly the futility of maintaining a fight for social goals within the framework of civil debate. When the forces of oppression come to maintain themselves in power against established law, peace is considered already broken.

In these conditions, popular discontent manifests itself in more active forms. An attitude of resistance crystallizes in an outbreak of fighting, provoked initially by the conduct of the authorities.

Where a government has come into power through some form of popular vote, fraudulent or not, and maintains at least an appearance of constitutional legality, the guerrilla outbreak cannot be promoted, since the possibilities of peaceful struggle have not yet been exhausted.

We have defined guerrilla war as the extension of politics by means of armed conflict. It follows that the extension cannot logically come until all acceptable peaceful solutions – appeals, legislative and judicial action, and the resources of the ballot box – have been proved worthless. Were it otherwise, there would be

no hope of enlisting the popular support essential to revolutionary activity.

If people are to accept the risks and responsibilities of organized violence, they must believe first that there is no alternative; second, that the cause is compelling; third, that they have reasonable expectation of success. The last named is perhaps the most powerful of motives.

Where the cause appears just, the situation is intolerable, and oppression past all appeal, the way to action is clear.

Even then, however, much groundwork must be done before a guerrilla campaign will become feasible.

The experiences of Algeria, of Cuba, and of other successful revolutions indicate that, in most circumstances, guerrillas require the active support of a political organization outside of their own ranks but dedicated to their cause, an urban arm of the revolutionary movement that can provide assistance by means both legal and illicit, from placing bombs to defending accused revolutionaries in the courts of law (assuming that these still exist).

Isolation, military and political, is the great enemy of guerrilla movements. It is the task of the urban organization to prevent this isolation, to provide diversions and provocations when needed, to maintain contact, to keep the world aware of a revolution in progress even when there is no progress to report.

Usually the revolutionary political organization will have two branches: one subterranean and illegal, the other visible and quasi-legitimate.

On the one hand, there will be the activists—saboteurs, terrorists, arms runners, fabricators of explosive devices, operators of a clandestine press, distributors of political pamphlets, and couriers to carry messages from one guerrilla sector to another, using the towns as communications centres.

On the other hand, there will be sympathizers and fellow travellers, those not really of the underground, operating for the most part within the law, but sustaining the efforts of the activists, and, of themselves, accomplishing far more important tasks. The visible organization will, of course, have invisible links with the revolutionary underground, and, through it, with the guerrillas in the countryside. But its real work will be to serve as a respectable façade for the revolution, a civilian front, or, as the Cubans called it, *resistencia civica*, made up of intellectuals, tradesmen, clerks, students, professionals, and the like—above all, of women—capable of promoting funds, circulating petitions, organizing boycotts, raising popular demonstrations, informing friendly journalists,

spreading rumours, and in every way conceivable waging a massive propaganda campaign aimed at two objectives: the strengthening and brightening of the rebel 'image', and the discrediting of the regime.

3 Inception and evolution of an insurgency. Transition to civil war. Alternative solutions. The Cuban example.

Let us say that a cause exists. Peaceful alternatives have been exhausted. The revolutionary organizations have come into being, perhaps only in skeletal form, but sufficient to the immediate need.

Somewhere in the remotest province, which will be the most revolutionary because the most neglected and the most favourable to guerrilla action because the most primitive and inaccessible, insurrection breaks and spreads.

A rebel band springs into existence, composed of armed civilians who call themselves patriots, and whom the government will call bandits or communists.

A government arsenal is assaulted, a police post is burned, a radio station is briefly seized, and a proclamation is issued in the name of the revolution. The hour is at hand, the people are in arms, the tyrant (or puppet, or foreigner) must go. A blow has been struck for national liberation and the lines of battle are drawn.

The aims and principles of the revolution are specified in appropriate rhetoric, with patriotic references and historical footnotes. They are just aims, worthy principles. Who would propound any others? They involve popular grievances, and they strike a popular response.

The towns and the countryside are abuzz with rumours. Young men and boys who have longed for the day of decision hasten to consult one another as to the role that each can, or should, or will play in the conflict to come. Members of the opposition parties, who have heretofore confined their intransigence to the lecture platform and the writing of editorials, now must take a position. The blow that has been struck is a catalyst, deciding new alignments and future attitudes. Who will join the rebels? Who will walk the neutral line, or abandon his principles and make common cause with the oppressor?

Since it is not in the nature of governments to treat with armed civilians, the insurrection must be put down, order established, and

confidence restored. Already there are discreet questions being put by foreign embassies, and although these embassies want reassurance, they are not above consulting with the political opposition; they may even establish an informal liaison with the rebels, both to gain intelligence and by way of insurance. Business leaders and banks, both foreign and domestic, will be close behind, and not always so discreet. The situation, if allowed to develop, is certain to attract foreign journalists, and the rebels, perhaps insignificant in themselves from the government's point of view, will then find the platform from which to amplify their cause – and the embarrassment of the regime – a thousandfold.

The government is not concerned about the loss of a few policemen, or even an arsenal, but it is terrified of the attendant publicity, which casts doubts on its stability and thus on the future of the economy. Besides, who knows what other insurrections may not be brewing?

Reassuring statements are issued, provincial garrisons are quietly reinforced. An expedition is sent, with as little fanfare as possible, to extirpate the bandits, root and branch.

Now is the critical time for the revolution. If the insurrection has been well timed, the terrain well chosen, and the guerrilla leaders competent and determined, the military effort will fail. The experience of scores of guerrilla campaigns in the era since the Second World War – indeed, of the American Revolution and of the Peninsular War in Spain (1804–14) – shows that it is virtually impossible to stamp out guerrillas in rural areas where they have room to manoeuvre and to hide, assuming that they also have the support of the rural population. Conceivably it may be accomplished by exterminating the rural population itself, but such Draconian methods failed even the Nazis in Eastern Europe, and not for scruples or lack of determination on their part.

This is not to say that guerrillas can win battles. In the early stage of the insurgency they will have no business to seek battles and every reason to shun them. Rather, the rebel strategy will be:

1. To attack only when assured of success by the overwhelming superiority of firepower, position, and the element of surprise, and only in pursuit of limited objectives, such as the capture of arms, or to create a diversion from some other action, or to avoid encirclement;

2. To use the campaign as an educational tool and a propaganda weapon by disclosing the impotence of the enemy, showing that he can be defied with impunity; to proselytize among the rural population by identifying with its grievances and aspirations and

by putting the burden and the blame of bloodshed on the repressive government as the clear aggressor it will necessarily become in the course of the anti-guerrilla campaign.

In the beginning, only small actions in isolated sectors will be possible. Later, as the guerrillas grow stronger, they will divide their forces, to take their revolutionary message into new areas, and to harass the army on a broader scale, forcing it to extend its lines so that its defences are weakened, and small units can be reduced, one at a time.

Throughout the campaign to the final stage, the rebel strategy will be to avoid a military decision, until an equalization of forces has been reached, and the government army can be confronted on the battlefield with clear assurance of success.

At the onset, defiance will be enough. The existence of insurgency will in itself serve to discredit the government and so to advance the rebel cause. The difficulty will be to continue to make political capital of an uprising that can consist, initially, of only small actions. Just as the regime depends for its life on an appearance of stability and progress, so does the rebel leader depend on action as the means of asserting his intransigence and winning mass support.

The guerrillas have struck their opening blow. The moment of hot pursuit dies, they must turn and strike again – at the vanguard of the expeditionary force or its outposts, at a supply column, at a depot where arms can be obtained.

If their clandestine organization in the towns is up to it, there will now be incidents of terrorism or of industrial sabotage, to heighten the crisis. If there are atrocities in the way of reprisal on the part of the authorities, they must be well publicized. If there are martyrs, there must be big funerals, protests led by the mothers of the slain, outcries of popular indignation. Ideally there will be a general strike. With it will come further repression, a curfew, beatings, arrests, creating further alienation of the populace from the regime, perhaps creating new martyrs, new incidents.

As it becomes clear that the government can no longer maintain order and cannot suppress the insurrection, the revolutionary tide begins to rise and swell. Students join the ranks of the underground. The working class and liberal middle-class elements of the towns – housewives, white-collar workers, the 'out' political factions, the economic nationalists, idealists of one sort or another, and the disaffected of all classes – join the popular protest against persecution and the loss of civil liberties. Hunted members of the

clandestine organization flee to the countryside to join the guerrillas, and peasants who have become the victims of a military campaign which is sure to claim innocent casualties, or who have fallen under suspicion for their association with the rebels, also swell the insurgent force.

As it grows, it becomes capable of action over wider territory; even more important, it becomes capable of establishing guerrilla bases in areas which the military can no longer control. With the establishment of such bases come into being a rebel government and a guerrilla economy, capable of supporting the guerrilla fighters independently of raids and smuggled supplies from the towns.

In a later phase, the base areas are expanded, continual pressure being maintained against the government forces on their perimeters, until the guerrillas hold or operate freely in most of the rural territory of entire regions, confining the army, except for excursions which will grow shorter and more dangerous as time passes, to their fortified strong points in the towns.

At this point, the conflict begins to resemble a civil war between territorial entities of the same nation, each with its separate economy and government. There will, however, be significant differences: 1. The territory of the guerrillas will be rural and its economy agricultural and primitive, while the economy of the enemy will be industrial – continuing to present targets for sabotage – and his territory increasingly restricted to urban areas; 2. The legitimate government will continue to suffer all the pangs and pressures, political, diplomatic, economic, of a regime confronted by open insurgency which it cannot suppress, while the rebels will only gain prestige and popular appeal by their successful insurgency.

We have been discussing characteristic developments in a revolutionary situation, from the start of an insurgency to the point at which a relative balance of forces is reached. The question remains as to *what sort* of decision will follow – military or political.

In the smaller, semi-colonial countries with economies and to some extent governments dependent on richer and more powerful neighbours (Cuba is the revolutionary prototype), I am inclined to believe that the political decision, the easier and less costly of the alternatives, is almost always possible – barring outside intervention.

The Cuban revolution provides an excellent example of the process that we have been discussing in hypothesis.

The stage had been set much as I have described it above.

In December 1956, Fidel Castro and eighty-one armed followers disembarked from a leaking motor cruiser on the lonely shore of Cuba's easternmost province of Oriente, arriving from Mexico. In the month that followed, the force was reduced to a round dozen, most of the other men being killed or captured in a military ambush before they could make their way into the mountains.

Castro's military activities during the next six months were minuscule. They consisted of small raids on isolated army posts (yet the first produced sufficient captured weapons to double the force, when recruits were found), sugar mills, and villages on the edge of the Sierra Maestra range. When I first met Castro in the Sierra in April 1957, he had perhaps one hundred followers. Half of these had arrived only two weeks before from Santiago, the provincial capital, where they had formed the bulk of his urban underground.

The biggest single action of the *fidelistas* during this period was an attack on 28 May 1957, on the small military outpost of Ubero, manned by about seventy soldiers. Rebel losses came to eight dead; military losses were put at thirty. Other actions during the first year were on a similar scale, or smaller, and at no time during the entire insurrectionary period did battles involve more than a few hundred men on either side. In almost all cases of unprovoked attack, where there was no prior move by the Batista military, the rebel purpose was to capture weapons with which to arm more guerrillas.

The scale of the action was miniature, yet propaganda victories came early and were international in their scope. One followed the other. The reports of the *New York Times* correspondent Herbert Matthews made Fidel Castro's name a household word in the United States; subsequent publicity carried it around the world.

The effect, on the political and economic level, was to bring about an American arms embargo against the government of Fulgencio Batista, to discourage investment and restrict credits to such an extent as to put a severe strain on the regime, and to cause, gradually, a failure of nerve within the administration that spread to the military and made it practically impotent long before most of the troops had ever heard a rifle shot.

The Batista regime was hopelessly corrupt and inefficient. When it fell, it appeared, superficially, to have fallen of its own weight and weakness. Foreign journalists covering the story could not quite believe that Castro's handful of bearded riflemen had had much to do with it, except on the propaganda level.

At first, Batista had been disdainful of what appeared to be a small band of political adventurers, almost completely isolated in the remote Sierra Maestra. After the first fitful attempts to flush the guerrillas out of the mountains, he was inclined to dismiss the danger, and to cede to Castro by default a territory so remote, inaccessible, thinly populated, and uneconomic as to be scarcely worth bothering about. Bandits had existed in the Sierra before; they had attracted little attention and had done no great harm. Doubtless Batista reasoned that the publicity would soon die away and that in due time the adventurers would be starved out of their sanctuary, or grow weary of a fruitless campaign and give it up.

Later he was to feel that he had grossly underestimated the threat, and to see rebels everywhere – even where there were none.

With a secure mountain base, Castro was able to recruit a strong irregular force, and to make what he had seem many times stronger than it actually was. Fast-moving guerrilla patrols, sometimes of only half a dozen men, managed to be everywhere at once. No army patrol was quite safe in the mountains; no outpost, sugar plantation, or village was safe in the foothills or within striking distance of them.

When Castro grandiosely announced a 'total war' in March of 1958 and warned of 'columns' moving quickly north, east, and west towards key objectives in all parts of the island, the army reacted as to an invasion. It had no way of knowing that the 'columns' consisted of fewer than two hundred men in all, or that a so-called 'second front', announced at the same time, had been opened in northern Oriente by a force of no more than sixty-five guerrillas – their heaviest weapon a .30-calibre Browning automatic rifle.

At the onset of the insurrection, Batista had sent five thousand soldiers to the Sierra Maestra to cordon off the area and eliminate the guerrillas.

The Sierra runs more than one hundred miles east and west and is fifteen to twenty-five miles deep. Simple arithmetic shows how impossible was the task set for the army, given a trackless terrain of precipitous and thickly-wooded mountains. It would have been impossible with twice the number of troops.

Aircraft were used against the guerrillas, but as Castro noted, the thick, wet woods blotted out the effects of high explosive bombs and napalm within twenty-five to fifty yards. There was little danger even had the bombardiers been accurate and the

location of the guerrillas known – and neither of these ‘ifs’ ever prevailed. The only damage done by the aircraft was to the thatched *bohios* of the mountain dwellers, living in cultivated clearings.

The Sierra quickly became the first *territorio libre* of the revolution, and the first year was devoted by the free-ranging guerrillas to building a rear-base economy – small shops for the fabrication of uniforms and equipment, for making crude explosive devices and for repairing arms, for canning foodstuffs, and so on – and proselytizing the inhabitants of the zone.

The harassment of the outlying districts and the interception of army patrols were undertaken as a matter of course. It was relatively easy because of the superior military intelligence of the guerrillas – thanks to the co-operation of the *guajiros*. Seldom was a military patrol able to come within even a few miles of the *fidelista* force without the guerrillas becoming aware of it.

One of Castro's first acts on entering the Sierra had been to execute two bandits, accused of rape and murder, so dramatically establishing a revolutionary government with a code of law, which could be looked to as a stabilizing force in an area long neglected by the Havana government.

The next step, important in winning a following politically and recruiting militarily, was to promulgate an agrarian reform law that conferred title on hundreds of small tenants, sharecroppers, and squatters, who were told that they now owned the land they tilled.

Similar tactics were followed in the more densely populated, rich coffee-growing uplands of the so-called *Segundo Frente*, *Frank Pais*, opened by Raul Castro. A code of law was imposed, taxes were collected, and certain benefits – schools, hospitals – were conferred in return. Supplies were scrupulously paid for – in cash. The villagers were treated much as they would have been treated by any ordinary government – except that political indoctrination was more intense and more was demanded of them, in the way of identification with the revolution and adherence to its goals.

The few rural guard posts in the area were quickly eliminated. Since they consisted of no more than a few men at each post, they presented no obstacle for even so small an ‘army’ as that of Raul Castro, with sixty-five men, all of whom could be concentrated on a single objective at a time.

Army columns sent into the area were ambushed as they entered, and then, after brief resistance, allowed to pass. As they returned, they were likely to be ambushed again at other points – and again permitted to pass.

If pursued, the guerrillas simply withdrew into the wooded hills, dispersed, and regrouped elsewhere. When the zone was clear, they returned to the villages. After a few weeks of this futile exercise, the army ceased to send patrols, and contented itself with strengthening the garrisons in the towns on the outskirts of the free territory. But as the rebel force grew from internal recruitment and its economy prospered, these garrisons, too, became unsafe, and had to be reduced in number for reasons of security.

In terms both of expense and of military manpower, it became simply uneconomical for the government to attempt to hold dozens of tiny villages and farms and to police an area several thousand square miles in extent; and so the military excursions ceased and the villages were abandoned to the rebels, the military having the larger towns and the uneasy provincial capital to defend. In this manner, the liberated territory was gradually extended. At its expanding periphery, a no-man's-land was created, visited by both rebels and Batista troops but held by neither. Slowly, bits of this neutral strip were also nibbled away, as not worth fighting for, and the free zone continued to grow.

Within three months, the army found itself unable to protect the big American nickel and cobalt mines on Oriente's northern coast, except in daylight. For reasons of political expedience, these were permitted to continue in operation. But the rebels helped themselves to such motor transport as they were able to use – several dozen jeeps and trucks from the mines – and earthmoving equipment for building new roads and improving those that existed.

A rebel guard post was actually established within a few yards of the entrance to the great United States naval base at Guantanamo Bay. When the Americans were found to be fuelling Batista's military aircraft on one occasion and supplying the air force with rockets on another – this after an arms embargo had been declared by the United States – Raul Castro's guerrillas promptly kidnapped fifty-odd American sailors and marines on an outing, along with their excursion bus, and simultaneously swooped down on the mining communities and a United Fruit Company experimental station to seize half a dozen executives and engineers as hostages.

The resultant embarrassment to Batista was great. It effectively demonstrated, to a world largely unaware of the dimensions of the guerrilla campaign in remote Oriente, that the dictator no longer had control of a considerable part of his country.

That the great United States itself could be defied by a few hundred Cuban guerrillas was a further political lesson – and a

powerful one. It naturally increased pressure on Batista to 'do something'. In the circumstances, it is hard to see what he could have done. Short of exterminating his own people and burning their villages, he was helpless. In the extremity of the final months, a few military commanders in the field, subsequently executed as war criminals, began to wage such a scorched earth campaign. But by then it was far too late.

The rebels had built a strong force and a viable economy in secure rear-base areas. In northern Oriente, they had control of the entire national coffee crop, worth some sixty million dollars; since the government had to have it and could not get it in any other way, it was allowed to come to market, and was duly taxed by the guerrillas.

Other farm produce was also marketed. In addition to the revenue it brought, it provided the guerrillas, in exchange, with supplies which they were unable to obtain within the liberated territory. The government needed the crops for the sake of its own economy; it was also in the position of having to maintain an appearance of normality, a pretence of business-as-usual (venality also played a part), and for these reasons tolerated a commerce that nourished the rebellion.

Guerrilla action continued, slow, sporadic, and small-scale, often serving merely as a distraction while the rebel build-up within the free zones continued, yet always having definite objectives: the gradual extension of the *territorio libre*, the capture of arms, the training of new recruits.

A similar process had been going on in the middle of the island, in the mountains of the Escambray in Las Villas Province, on a smaller scale. In the late summer of 1958, two columns from the Sierra Maestra, having taken part in the defeat and capture of a regiment-sized expedition sent into the mountains in June, left the Sierra to join the rebels in the Escambray, arriving in early September.

The campaign gradually intensified on both fronts. Guerrilla patrols began to interdict the main roads and the national highway, railroad bridges were destroyed, traffic in the country was brought to a virtual standstill, except for the movement of large military convoys; then these, too, began to come under fire.

What had been a few small bands of guerrillas became a swarm. Sabotage and terrorism were stepped up in the towns. On occasion, rebel jeep patrols drove boldly into cities to reconnoitre the suburban areas. Small towns along the national highway were

isolated and their garrisons reduced. Santiago was cut off. In mid-island, an armoured train carrying troops to defend the city of Santa Clara was derailed and set afire, and its military passengers captured, along with a huge supply of arms, enough to supply all of the young volunteers in the city.

The demoralized Batista soldiers, restricted first to the towns and then to their own fortified barracks, found no military profit in venturing out; since the guerrillas would not stand and fight, unless assured of overwhelming odds. On the other hand, the troops risked ambush and capture or death whenever they travelled in less than company or even battalion strength. Slowly, lacking unified leadership, their communications destroyed, they allowed themselves to be sequestered. When the hour of decision came, most of them were on guard within their own isolated fortresses, controlling not even the towns they were supposed to defend.

The army general staff and the government, meanwhile, had been shattered by a general crisis of nerves, with no member of the establishment able to trust another and each preparing to sell out or get out at the first sign of the regime's collapse. The loss of confidence in Batista had proceeded to such an extent that the ambassador of the all-powerful United States, on whom the Cuban economy depended and whose puppet the government was for all practical purposes, was in the process of negotiating with the political opposition, seeking a conservative alternative to Batista, when the latter precipitately fled the country, along with his generals and the ranking members of his government.

To summarize the Cuban revolution in this way is to neglect the part played by the urban underground and the civic resistance movement – both of which contributed much, in the way of strikes, demonstrations, sabotage, and propaganda work, to undermine the morale of the government and to destroy the prestige without which it could no longer direct the economy nor continue to exist.

Yet in the final analysis, it was the guerrillas, waging a war of attrition, slowly nibbling away the rural areas, gradually expanding the free territories and building a military force with captured arms while strangling the army in its barracks, whose action was decisive.

Virtually all of the weapons to arm some fifteen hundred men, save a few hundred small arms smuggled in from the United States, were captured from Batista's troops, a few dozen or at most a hundred at a time. The fall of the Oriente capital of Santiago put tanks and artillery into the hands of the rebels. Further

surrenders in Las Villas gave them the means to confront any remaining army regiments that might have been disposed to fight.

But by that time, Batista had already fled, a general strike had put Havana in insurgent hands, the principal garrison at Camp Columbia, outside the capital, had surrendered without firing a shot, the navy had rebelled, and the war was over.

4 Protracted war. Popular forces versus regular armies. The guerrilla as missionary. Mao Tse-tung on the war of the flea. The lessons of China.

Revolutionary wars are generally, of necessity, wars of long duration. The seeds of revolution are slow to germinate; the roots and tendrils spread out silently underground long before there is any sign of sprout or bud. Then suddenly one day, like new wheat springing up in a cultivated field, there is a blaze of colour, an overnight growth: the rebels are there and everywhere.

It is customary to speak of guerrilla wars as wars of attrition. The phrase is not perfectly accurate. Guerrilla warfare is not so much abrasive as subversive. It is a growth that penetrates the crevices of a rotting structure and one day bursts it asunder.

Yet attrition does, after all, play a great part. In the political sphere, the government is subjected to a constant, wearing pressure that comes from the great expense and anxiety of the anti-guerrilla campaign and from the constant cry of the opposition, the banks, the business community: *When will it all end? What are you doing about it?*

Economic attrition has already been discussed. Sabotage is one aspect of it. The loss of credit and investment suffered by a country engaged in civil war is the other, far more important, aspect. No small nation, and few great ones, can stand the deprivation indefinitely. Yet the painful fact is that the guerrillas, for their part, *can* carry on indefinitely.

Having no vested interest, no political opposition within their own ranks, no economic problems other than those that can be solved by extending the war and capturing what they need, the insurgents have nothing to lose and everything to gain by continuing the struggle. And, on the other hand, they have nothing to gain and everything to lose by giving up. In fact, once the banner of rebellion has been raised and blood has been shed, it is no easy matter to give up. The rebels begin to fight for whatever reason: they continue because they must.

They fight, then, in order to survive. Given their inferiority of resources, they can survive only by avoiding direct confrontation with a superior enemy; that is, battle on the enemy's terms. Guerrilla strategy is dictated from the start by this consideration. The result – if the guerrillas are to be successful and to avoid extermination – is a *protracted* war. The conflict must continue until the movement has recruited and trained enough men, and come into possession of enough arms, to build a revolutionary army capable of defeating the regular army in open battle.

Failing this, it must continue until political developments resulting from the campaign have brought about the desired end: the rising of the masses of the people and the overthrow or abdication of the discredited government.

In Cuba, the Batista regime collapsed before the military confrontation had fully developed. The army, lacking leadership, its general staff gone, found no reason to continue the struggle, and surrendered. A general strike in Havana – in other words, a rising of the people – was sufficient to make it clear to the military that there would be no further purpose in fighting; Batista had fled and his designated heirs could not be forced on the rebellious country. Nothing but a revolutionary government would be accepted.

Cuba is a prototype. It is typical of the dependent, semi-colonial countries in which revolution can be attained without the bloody necessity of full-scale war. In such countries, it will be sufficient, barring intervention by the dominating colonial power, to create by guerrilla warfare the conditions in which a discredited government (discredited because it can no longer keep order and assure a profit to the country's proprietors) falls from lack of support, and the revolutionaries rush in to fill the political vacuum.

All of the Central American *dependencies* of the United States and most of the South American republics, economic and political *satellites* of the United States, are in the same category as Cuba. Their governments can see the handwriting on the Cuban wall; so can Washington. Hence the *almost hysterical* efforts since 1959 to isolate Cuba, to keep the infection from spreading. If it does spread, and there is evidence that this has already happened to some extent, they may be expected to go the way of Cuba. However, to say so is to assume that the United States will *not* intervene militarily. Intervention would create an entirely new picture; one could expect to see Indo-China re-created in Latin America. And revolutionary short-cuts, *à la Cuba*, would be out.

The remaining colonies of the European powers are in another category. Here, too, a political solution can obviate the necessity of

a military showdown. Yet in the case of the actual colonies, it will not be a matter of discrediting the colonial power or its government, but simply of taking the profit and prestige out of colonialism. Cyprus provides a good example of an insurgency that was successful simply because terror, sabotage, and constant disorder made the island too unprofitable and politically embarrassing for the British to remain. They got out, finally, not because they were forced out, but because there was no longer any compelling reason to remain (and there were many good reasons for withdrawing).

In a third category are those revolutionary wars that must be won, at last, on the battlefield. China is the classic example, the laboratory in which principles were evolved that are still being proven today, in all the backward areas of the world.

Popular revolutionary forces *can* defeat regular armies. This is the fundamental lesson of China. Popular forces, to put the matter more precisely, can *become* armies, making the transition from guerrilla activity to mobile warfare, that will be superior on their own ground to regular troops equipped with all of the heavy weapons produced by modern industry.

How can a nation that is not industrialized defeat one that is? This, says former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State E. L. Katzenbach, Jr., is the problem that confronted Mao Tse-tung.* The answer, which applies to insurgency anywhere, as against the mechanized army, is guerrilla warfare.

As Katzenbach sees it, Mao's approach to the theory of war as applied to his own peculiar situation – that of China – was simply to shift the emphasis customarily given to the fundamental components of previous military doctrine. Where the industrial nations stressed such tangible military factors as arms, logistics, and manpower, says Katzenbach, Mao looked to the *intangibles*: *time*, *space*, and *will*.

Lacking the arms with which to confront well-equipped armies in the field, Mao avoided battle by surrendering territory. In so doing, Katzenbach writes, he traded *space* for *time*, and used the time to produce *will*: the psychological capacity of the Chinese people to resist defeat.

This is the essence of guerrilla warfare.

Although Mao never stated it quite this way [writes Katzenbach], the basic premise of his theory is that political mobilization may be substituted for industrial mobilization with a successful military

* E. L. Katzenbach, Jr., 'Time, Space, and Will: The Politico-Military Views of Mao Tse-tung', in *The Guerrilla – and How to Fight Him*. Ed. Col. T. N. Greene, Praeger: Pall Mall Press.

outcome. That is to say, his fundamental belief is that only those who will admit defeat can be defeated. So if the totality of a population can be made to resist surrender, this resistance can be turned into a war of attrition which will eventually and inevitably be victorious.

The context brings to mind the well-known quotation from Mao: 'With the common people of the whole country mobilized, we shall create a vast sea of humanity and drown the enemy in it.'

As for the *time* factor, Katzenbach observes:

Mao holds that military salvation stems from political conversion. But, note: Conversion takes time.

So Mao's military problem was how to organize *space* so that it could be made to yield *time*. His political problem was how to organize *time* so that it could be made to yield *will*, that quality which makes willingness to sacrifice the order of the day, and the ability to bear suffering cheerfully the highest virtue. So Mao's real military problem was not that of getting the war over with, the question to which Western military thinkers have directed the greater part of their attention, but that of keeping it going.

Mao's problem, then: how to avoid a military decision. His answer: hit and run, fight and live to fight another day, give way before the determined advance of the enemy, and, like the sea, close in again as the enemy passes. The formula, *space* for *time*, is well conceived. But in his *Selected Military Writings*, Mao makes it clear that nothing is gained unless the time is used to produce political results, by raising the revolutionary consciousness, the *will* of the masses:

When the Red Army fights, it fights not merely for the sake of fighting, but to agitate the masses, to organize them, and to help them establish revolutionary political power; apart from such objectives, fighting loses its meaning and the Red Army the reason for its existence.

Mao believes that revolutionary war itself is the university in which guerrilla fighters are schooled, and that war develops its own lessons and principles:

Our chief method is to learn warfare through warfare. A person who has had no opportunity to go to school can learn warfare – he can learn through fighting in war. A revolutionary war is a mass undertaking; it is often not a matter of first learning and then doing, but of doing and then learning, for doing itself is learning. There is a gap between the ordinary civilian and the soldier, but it is no Great Wall, and it can be quickly closed, and the way to close it is to take part in revolution, in war.

Political mobilization – raising the level of political consciousness of the people and involving them actively in the revolutionary struggle – is the first task of the guerrillas; and it is the nature of this effort, which necessarily takes time, that accounts for the protracted character of revolutionary war. The study of Mao, however, discloses something more:

Time is required, not alone for political mobilization, but to allow the inherent weaknesses of the enemy to develop under the stress of war.

Mao makes this point more than once in his military writings, in several different contexts. In the Sino-Japanese war, for example, Japan, an industrial power, had the great advantage of a superior war machine, capable of striking devastating blows at the poorly armed troops of semi-feudal, semi-colonial, unindustrial China. Yet such an advantage, unless *immediately* decisive, could not compensate for defects that would become apparent in prolonged conflict.

The first of these was that Japan, while powerful militarily, lacked the base in natural resources and manpower to sustain her war machine, far from home and in a vast, populous country over a long period of time. Indeed, the war had been started to compensate for the defect, but extended through conquest Japan's paucity of material resources. In so far as this was true, war was an act of desperation, and a contradiction, putting the cart before the horse. For, what would happen if the war was *not* won quickly and the new wealth quickly absorbed and exploited?

Japan was seeking, of necessity, a war of quick decision. The correct military response was to deny it, by avoiding a military confrontation and fighting along the lines of guerrilla and mobile warfare, trading the vast space of China for the time necessary 1. to let the inherent weaknesses of Japan develop and show themselves under the stresses of a protracted war; 2. to build Chinese resistance forces to the strength and degree of organization needed to confront the gradually weakened Japanese war machine.

As Mao analysed the situation:

... Japan's war is conducted on the basis of her great military, economic and political-organizational power, but at the same time it rests on an inadequate natural endowment. Japan's military, economic and political-organizational power is great but quantitatively inadequate. Japan is a comparatively small country, deficient in manpower and in military, financial and material resources, and she cannot stand a prolonged war. Japan's rulers are endeavouring to resolve this difficulty through war, but again they will get the very reverse of

what they desire; that is to say, the war they have launched to resolve this difficulty will end in adding to it and even in exhausting Japan's original resources.

Other defects were apparent:

... the internal and external contradictions of Japanese imperialism have driven it not only to embark on an adventurist war unparalleled in scale, but also to approach its final collapse. In terms of development, Japan is no longer a thriving country; the war will not lead to the prosperity sought by her ruling classes, but to the very reverse, the doom of Japanese imperialism. This is what we mean by the retrogressive nature of Japan's war. It is this reactionary quality, coupled with the military-feudal character of Japanese imperialism, that gives rise to the peculiar barbarity of Japan's war. All of which will arouse to the utmost the class antagonisms within Japan, the antagonism between the Japanese and the Chinese nations, and the antagonism between Japan and most other countries of the world.

... while Japan can get international support from the Fascist countries, the international opposition she is bound to encounter will be greater than her international support. This opposition will gradually grow and eventually will not only cancel out support but even bear down on Japan herself. ... To sum up, Japan's advantage lies in her great capacity to wage war, and her disadvantages lie in the reactionary and barbarous nature of her war, in the inadequacy of her manpower and material resources, and in her meagre international support.

Against the Japanese war-making capacity were pitted the Chinese advantages of space, time, and will. The long struggle for national liberation, as Mao notes, had tempered the Chinese people; social and political gains had created a *will* that was capable of great sacrifice and resistance over long periods of time; and, 'Again by contrast with Japan, China is a very big country with vast territory, rich resources, a large population, and plenty of soldiers and is capable of sustaining a long war.'

Space in which to manoeuvre, abundant manpower, strong international support, and the Chinese will to resist aggression – these were China's advantages. They were also the reasons for avoiding a quick decision in favour of a protracted war, one in which Japan's single advantage, superior arms, and organization, would be worn away.

... it can be seen that Japan has great military, economic, and political-organizational power, but that her war is reactionary and barbarous, her manpower and material resources are inadequate, and she is in an unfavourable position internationally. China, on the contrary, has less military, economic, and political-organizational power, but she is in her era of progress, her war is progressive and

just, she is moreover a big country, a fact which enables her to sustain a protracted war, and she will be supported by most countries. The above are the basic, mutually contradictory characteristics of the Sino-Japanese War. They have determined and are determining the protracted character of the war and the fact that the final victory will go to China and not to Japan. The war is a contest between these characteristics. They will change in the course of the war, each according to its own nature; and from this everything else will follow.

Similar considerations determined the protracted character of the struggle against the warlords and later the Kuomintang during China's long civil war. In analysing the Chinese situation, Mao notes the contradictions and conflicts of interest that arise on several planes: for example, between the various imperialist powers seeking dominance in China, within the Chinese ruling classes, and between the ruling classes on the one hand and the broad masses of the people on the other.

1. Conflict among the warlords and against the Nationalist government creates a heavier burden of taxation.
2. Heavier taxation causes the landlord class to exact more exorbitant rents from the peasants and increases the hatred of the latter for the landlords.
3. The backward condition of Chinese industry, as related to foreign industry and foreign concessions in China, causes a more vicious exploitation of Chinese labour and drives the wedge deeper between the workers and the Chinese bourgeoisie.
4. 'Because of the pressure of foreign goods, the exhaustion of the purchasing power of the workers and the peasant masses, and the increase in government taxation, more and more dealers in Chinese-made goods and independent producers are being driven to bankruptcy. Because the reactionary government, though short of provisions and funds, endlessly expands its armies and thus constantly expands the warfare, the masses of the soldiers are in a constant state of privation. Because of the growth in government taxation, the rise in rent and interest demanded by the landlord and the spread of the disasters of war, there are famine and banditry everywhere and the peasant masses and the urban poor can hardly keep alive. Because the schools have no money, many students fear that their education may be interrupted; because production is backward, many graduates have no hope of employment.'

Mao's conclusion:

Once we understand all these contradictions, we shall see in what a desperate situation, in what a chaotic state, China finds herself. We

shall also see that the high tide of revolution against the imperialists, the warlords and the landlords is inevitable, and will come very soon. All China is littered with dry faggots which will soon be aflame. The saying, 'A single spark can start a prairie fire' is an apt description of how the current situation will develop. We need only look at the strikes by the workers, the uprisings by the peasants, the mutinies of soldiers and the strikes of students which are developing to see that it cannot be long before a 'spark' kindles 'a prairie fire'.

In his theory of guerrilla warfare, whether against domestic or foreign enemies, Mao distinguishes carefully the various phases of development of the campaign, laying particular emphasis on the first phase, which he calls the period of the *strategic defensive*.

In the beginning – and the first phase may last for many months – territory is nothing, attrition is everything. The enemy is permitted, even encouraged to expand where he will. The guerrillas give ground, conducting only harassing action, circling around, fighting always in the enemy's rear areas and presenting no continuous front for the foe to smash.

The enemy is engaged, during this period, in a strategic offensive, with the object of wiping out the guerrillas. On his part, the action is characterized by a series of 'encirclement and suppression' campaigns (compare the so-called 'clear and hold' efforts in South Vietnam today, under American leadership) during which the effort is made to occupy territory and to rid it of guerrilla infestation, piecemeal.

The contradiction implicit in this effort is that it converts increasingly large parts of the national territory into government 'rear areas' where guerrilla operations work best. The repressive forces succeed in encircling areas of guerrilla activity – no one stops them – but in the process they themselves become encircled by guerrillas, and while the guerrillas can almost always slip out of any given encirclement, by dispersion and exfiltration, how can the army slip out? Where is the front? It does not exist. Movements of men and material become progressively greater and more expensive; the lines of supply and communication become ever longer, more attenuated, and more vulnerable to guerrilla attack. In effect, the army, in occupying broad expanses of rural territory, abets the guerrillas by providing them with broader and easier targets and more accessible sources of arms and ammunition.

The guerrilla strategy remains constant during this period, although tactics vary with the situation. The strategy is to force the enemy to spread himself as thin as possible, by harassing him all along the line, wherever he is weak, and then to concentrate all

available guerrilla strength to annihilate – never merely to rout – inferior enemy units, one at a time.

'Ours are guerrilla tactics,' [writes Mao.] 'They consist mainly of the following points:

'Divide our forces to arouse the masses, concentrate our forces to deal with the enemy.

'The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue.

'To extend stable base areas, employ the policy of advancing in waves; when pursued by a powerful enemy, employ the policy of circling around.

'Arouse the greatest numbers of the masses in the shortest time by the best possible methods.

'These tactics are just like casting a net; at any moment we should be able to cast it or draw it in. We cast it wide to win over the masses and draw it in to deal with the enemy.'

In areas where little opposition is met, the net is cast. The guerrillas disperse, to carry on the work of political indoctrination, to strengthen the internal economy of the revolutionary movement, to establish rear-base areas – bases which, it should be noted, can be expanded or contracted, or even abandoned, on short notice.

Where opposition is strong, the net is drawn in. The guerrillas are able to concentrate heavy forces – Mao recommends two, or four, or even six times the enemy strength – against a single enemy weak point.

Battles are not prolonged. On the contrary, it is Mao who has invented the 'five-minute attack'; it consists of a sudden onslaught, a brief and furious interval of fighting, and then the assault is broken off as suddenly as it began and the guerrillas rapidly retire, having inflicted as many casualties and taken as many arms as possible during the stated time but not lingering even a minute for more. Mao stresses the battle of quick decision – the very opposite of Western military strategy. Where the army backed by heavy industry is able to make a long-drawn technological contest of each battle, relying on superiority of equipment and logistics to tell in the end, the guerrillas must rely on speed, superior position, and locally superior manpower, and must break off the engagement before the superiority of heavy weapons can take its toll.

As we have remarked before, the guerrilla fights the war of the flea. The flea bites, hops, and bites again, nimbly avoiding the foot that would crush him. He does not seek to kill his enemy at a blow, but to bleed him and feed on him, to plague and bedevil him, to keep him from resting and to destroy his nerve and his morale. All

of this requires time. Still more time is required to breed more fleas. What starts as a local infestation must become an epidemic, as one by one the areas of resistance link up, like spreading ink spots on a blotter.

In the second phase of the campaign, the period of equilibrium, a stalemate sets in. The government finds it cannot destroy the guerrillas; for the moment it can only seek to contain them, while preparing new offensives for the future. The guerrillas cannot destroy the army. They continue to harass it, taking advantage of lulls in the conflict to expand the revolutionary base areas, nibbling away at the fringe of no-man's-land that surrounds each liberated zone, improving the internal economy of crops, workshops, arms repair depots, and using the time to agitate the people, to forward the war of propaganda, and to sharpen the internal conflicts that shake the enemy camp as the long, expensive anti-guerrilla campaign bogs down and the end appears hopelessly far away.

The third stage, that of the revolutionary strategic offensive, or general offensive, begins when the opposing forces of the government and those of the guerrillas have reached a balance, and the insurgents seize the military initiative, now no longer as pure guerrillas, but as mobile columns up to divisional strength, capable of confronting and destroying the army in open battle.

Where the insurgents formerly gave way at the approach of the enemy, or depended on hit-and-run ambushes, they will now give battle, using small units, to pin down the main forces of the government while their regular troops are thrown – always in superior numbers – into concentrated attacks on the most vulnerable objectives along the enemy's attenuated lines of support or weakest points of concentration.

When encircled, the rebels, instead of dispersing and exfiltrating under cover of darkness, as before, will concentrate and make a powerful breakthrough at a chosen point in the enemy's lines – again, perhaps, using secondary troops to pin down the army in other areas.

Gradually, sometimes using guerrilla tactics, at other times concentrating for powerful strategic blows, the rebels will succeed in cutting the enemy's main lines of communication and isolating segments of the enemy's forces, which can be destroyed one at a time. The insurgents will themselves begin to hold territory, first expanding their rural bases until they have blotted up most of the countryside, making it untenable for the enemy, then seizing the villages and the larger towns, driving the army back into its urban strong points, which, once isolated, can be reduced piecemeal.

As the strong points are reduced and the army's manpower is whittled down, with big units captured or annihilated and others defecting (as may be expected if they are native troops), the rebels will come into possession of heavy weapons – tanks, artillery – which can be used to reduce even larger strong points, until at last a siege of the cities, aided by popular uprisings, brings the war to its successful termination in the destruction or surrender of the army and the collapse of the government.

A principle can be observed throughout this entire process: the more the enemy holds, the more he has to defend and the broader the insurgent target area. Yet on the other hand, the more the insurgent fights and wins, the more he has with which to fight and to win – in arms, in manpower, in material resources. Thus the objectives of the government and of the insurgent must be diametrically opposed. The army seeks to end the war as quickly as possible, in order to minimize its losses; the insurgent seeks to prolong it, since he has everything to gain by it.

It is clear that the guerrilla objectives cannot be accomplished overnight, or even within any predictable period. It is a basic premise of Mao's theory that the phases of the campaign will overlap, that on many occasions setbacks will occur, mobile units may have to be dispersed, again to become guerrilla bands, the third phase may slip back into the second, territory that has been won may be surrendered, and may change hands many times before it can finally be consolidated as part of the spreading Red territory.

On a map, the areas of guerrilla activity will appear as tiny ink spots. Gradually they will become splotches, and the splotches will grow larger until they finally run together into solid red, spreading over the entire national territory. But note: the colouration will progress, not from east to west or north to south, but from the outside in, from the mountains and the jungles to the cultivated rural areas, then to the villages within those areas, then to the towns, and along the national highways, and only in the final struggle to the diminishing pin-pricks of the cities.

The principles of the operation may be observed in the communist war on Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist troops in the period immediately following the Second World War. Analysing a campaign of seventeen months duration in 1946–7, during which 640,000 Nationalist troops were killed or wounded and 1,050,000 were captured, Mao lists the following points of insurgent strategy:

1. Attack dispersed, isolated enemy forces first; attack concentrated, strong forces later.

2. Take small and medium cities and extensive rural areas first; take big cities later.

3. Make wiping out the enemy's effective strength our main objective; do not make holding or seizing a city or place our main objective. Holding or seizing a city or place is the outcome of wiping out the enemy's effective strength, and often a city or place will be held or seized for good only after it has changed hands a number of times.

4. In every battle, concentrate an absolutely superior force (two, three, four, and sometimes even five or six times the enemy's strength), encircle the enemy forces completely, strive to wipe them out thoroughly, and do not let any escape from the net. In special circumstances, use the method of dealing the enemy crushing blows, that is, concentrate all-out strength to make a frontal attack and an attack on one or both of his flanks, with the aim of wiping out one part and routing another so that our army can swiftly move its troops to smash other enemy forces. Strive to avoid battles of attrition in which we lose more than we gain or break even. In this way, although inferior as a whole (in terms of numbers), we shall be absolutely superior in every part and every specific campaign, and this ensures victory in the campaign. As time goes on we shall become superior as a whole and eventually wipe out all of the enemy.

5. Fight no battle unprepared, fight no battle you are not sure of winning; make every effort to be well prepared for each battle, make every effort to ensure victory in the given set of conditions as between the enemy and ourselves.

6. Give full play to our style of fighting – courage in battle, no fear of sacrifice, no fear of fatigue, and continuous fighting (that is, fighting successive battles in a short time without rest).

7. Strive to wipe out the enemy when he is on the move. At the same time, pay attention to the tactics of positional attack and capture enemy-fortified points and cities.

8. Replenish our strength with all the arms and most of the personnel captured from the enemy. Our army's main sources of manpower and material are at the front.

9. Make good use of the intervals between campaigns to rest, train, and consolidate our troops. Periods of rest, training, and consolidation should not be very long, and the enemy should so far as possible be permitted no breathing space.

Much of what Mao enumerates will seem obvious, but there are important points to note, some of which are in direct conflict with conventional military doctrine.

Although the mobile warfare of insurgency resembles that of conventional forces, it is based on guerrilla strategy and works towards somewhat different objectives. The insurgents drive inward from rural areas towards the towns and then the cities. They occupy the hills and the woods before they seize the roads. In this,

they behave in a manner diametrically opposite to the dictates of Western military strategy, in which strong points – industrial centres, communication centres, population centres – are hit first and the mop-up of the rural areas is left until last. What counts for the insurgents is not strong points, but territory that the enemy cannot contest without involving himself in a contradiction, that of extending his lines and weakening his effective striking force. Hence the rural areas first, the cities last.

The main source of both rebel munitions and – in China – rebel manpower is the opposing army. The Chinese armies were conscripted, badly paid or not paid at all, often ill-nourished and ill-clothed. The troops were themselves peasants; it was to be expected that defections would be common, and this was the case. Mao had no scruples, for that matter, about recruiting bandits; they were of the same class origin and in much the same condition as the Nationalist soldiers and those of the warlords, and could be easily indoctrinated to fight in the popular cause. His reasoning, no doubt, was that peasants who had some military training were easier to absorb than peasants who had had none. As to the question of supplies, it is a tenet of guerrilla theory, not only in China but in all revolutionary wars, that the enemy must be the main source of weapons and ammunition. One advantage is that one always finds the proper calibres of ammunition close at hand. Another, greater advantage is that logistical problems are reduced to a minimum. The enemy supply lines serve both armies, and often serve the guerrilla army better than they do that of the adversary.

Guerrilla strategy is dynamic. It has positive political objectives and positive military goals. The strategic defensive, as Mao calls it, is an *active* defence based on incessant attack. The harrassing tactics of the guerrilla, while they bear superficial resemblance to the delaying actions fought by rear-guard regular troops, have a different purpose. It is to wear down the enemy, and to force him to over-extend his lines, so that his manpower can be annihilated, a unit at a time.

'Guerrillas can gain the initiative,' writes Mao, 'if they keep in mind the weak points of the enemy. Because of the enemy's insufficient manpower, guerrillas can operate over vast territories; because the enemy is a foreigner and a barbarian, guerrillas can gain the confidence of millions of their countrymen ...'

The reference was to the Japanese invader in China, and Mao makes it clear at all times that his laws of war were meant to apply specifically to China and the Chinese situation. What he says never-

theless has a more general application. For 'foreigner and barbarian' substitute 'oppressor and exploiter' and the confidence of which he speaks can be gained in many countries where no question of foreign intrusion arises.

On tactics: 'In guerrilla warfare select the tactics of seeming to come from the east and attacking from the west; avoid the solid, attack the hollow; attack; withdraw; deliver a lightning blow, seek a lightning decision . . .'

On politics: 'Without a political goal, guerrilla warfare must fail, as it must if its political objectives do not coincide with the aspirations of the people, and their sympathy, co-operation and assistance cannot be gained. The essence of guerrilla warfare is thus political in character.

'On the other hand, in a war of counter-revolutionary nature, there is no place for guerrilla hostilities. Because guerrilla warfare basically derives from the masses and is supported by them, it can neither exist nor flourish if it separates itself from their sympathies and co-operation.'

Mao's rules for the conduct of guerrilla warfare are rhetorical, redundant, and often less precise than one might wish. They leave many practical questions unanswered. It is to be remembered that he was writing political documents, not a text for insurgents. His collected works remain, nevertheless, the primer of guerrilla theory; and the study of his campaigns, which ended with the destruction and defeat of an army of 3,700,000 men (the greatest in Chinese history) reveals much that is relevant elsewhere, in countries which, like China, lack arms and industry, but do not lack the basic ingredients of revolutionary war: *space, time, and will.*

5 Colonial war and the French experience. Strategy and tactics of Vo Nguyen Giap. How the Vietminh won in Indo-China.

How do the 'laws of revolutionary war' laid down by Mao Tse-tung apply to the remaining colonies of the great powers?

The answer is implicit in the historical record. During the two decades since the Second World War *no colonial war* has been lost by a colonial people, once entered into. (Malaya and the Philippines are only apparent exceptions, not real ones. They will be discussed in a later chapter.)

In the more fortunate instances, the colonial powers have ceded their authority in good time, bowing before the wind of history. Elsewhere, revolutionary action has wrested the erstwhile colonies away by the extortion of terror and civil disorder, as in Cyprus and Morocco, or by clear force of arms, as in Algeria and Indo-China.

The struggle against the French colonial power in Indo-China is of especial interest. In it we find the most clear-cut examples both of the sort of revolutionary war that must be fought to a military decision (as opposed to the insurgency that ends in political decision), and of a war fought consciously and even conscientiously according to Mao's precepts.

As Katzenbach remarks: '... the war the Vietminh [followers of Ho Chi Minh] fought in northern Indo-China followed [Mao's] teachings phase by phase despite the claims of Vietminh leaders that they improved on the doctrines.'

The struggle lasted from 1946, when Ho Chi Minh took up arms against a French invasion (actually he had taken virtual possession of Vietnam the year before, with the surrender of the Japanese to British, Chinese, and native forces), until 1954, when the country was partitioned at the 17th Parallel under the terms of an international agreement reached at Geneva, following the fall of the French stronghold of Dien Bien Phu.

If the outcome of the war represented something less than a complete victory for the communist Vietminh, it nevertheless

spelled absolute defeat for the French, and marked the end of French rule in Vietnam. Although the bulk of the 500,000-man French Expeditionary Corps remained intact (172,000 casualties in eight years of fighting), its spirit was broken, and the political compromise that followed failed to disguise the fact that French arms had met ignominious defeat in the field, at the hands of what had been considered a rag-tag native army that could be smashed in ten weeks.

During eight years of battle the Vietminh passed from a movement of scattered guerrilla bands, operating in company or even platoon strength, to a regular army of mobile divisions armed with light artillery and equal in organization and fighting ability to the best that the French could put into the field. But while the final phase, the strategic offensive described by Mao, was fought by such an army, by far the great part of the long campaign was guerrilla warfare.

The definition of guerrilla warfare offered by General Vo Nguyen Giap, the victor of Dien Bien Phu, concurs with Mao's. Even the rhetoric is the same:

Guerrilla war is the form of fighting by the masses of a weak and badly equipped country against an aggressive army with better equipment and techniques. This is the way of fighting a revolution. Guerrillas rely on heroic spirit to triumph over modern weapons, avoiding the enemy when he is the stronger and attacking him when he is the weaker. Now scattering, now regrouping, now wearing out, now exterminating the enemy, they are determined to fight everywhere, so that wherever the enemy goes he is submerged in a sea of armed people who hit back at him, thus undermining his spirit and exhausting his forces.*

Fortunately for his cause, Giap had absorbed the practical wisdom as well as the political rhetoric of his mentor, so that he is on solid ground when he writes:

In addition to scattering to wear out the enemy, it is necessary to regroup big armed forces in favourable situations to achieve supremacy in attack at a given point and time to annihilate the enemy. Successes in many small fights added together gradually wear out the enemy manpower, while little by little strengthening our forces. The main goal of the fighting must be destruction of enemy manpower. Our own manpower should not be exhausted from trying to keep or occupy land.†

* Vo Nguyen Giap, 'Inside the Vietminh', in *The Guerrilla - and How to Fight Him*; slightly different translation in Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War, People's Army*, Praeger: Pall Mall Press.

† *Op. cit.*

Giap's definition of his objectives is purely military. In a colonial situation, the political effects of guerrilla war are less important, perhaps, than in a war against the native government of a semi-colonial country such as Cuba. Certainly they were less important in the case of a nation defending itself against an invader - France's role after the Second World War. But this is to speak of the effects of the struggle on government morale and on world opinion; clearly the primary political task of militating the people retained the same vital importance in Vietnam as anywhere, a fact which Giap himself recognizes.

Writing of the first years of the long guerrilla campaign, he says that in the beginning 'there appeared a tendency not to take into due account the part played by political work, and the political workers did not yet grasp [the fact] that the main task was political education and ideological leadership'.

Later, however, 'the terror was perceived, and due attention was paid to the key political problem, that of uniting the nation in all its social sectors, and joining all ethnic groups in a multi-national country against foreign domination. The Party strove hard to avail itself of favourable opportunities to push the people into the struggle,' Giap relates with considerable candour. And again: 'The National United Front was to be a vast assembly of all the forces capable of being united, neutralizing all those which could be neutralized, dividing all those it was possible to divide.'

Early neglect of the peasantry was quickly rectified in the face of the realities of a war in a peasant country, and agrarian reform with the slogan 'Land to the Tillers' became a rallying cry of the revolution.

The enemy of the Vietnamese nation [writes Giap] was aggressive imperialism, which had to be overthrown. But, as the imperialists had long since joined with the feudal landlords, the anti-imperialist struggle definitely could not be separated from anti-feudal action. On the other hand, in a backward colonial country such as ours, where the peasants make up the majority of the population, a people's war is essentially a peasant's war under the leadership of the working class. A general mobilization of the whole people is, therefore, neither more nor less than a mobilization of the rural masses.

The failure to form a broad popular front, especially one including the religious sects, notably the Buddhists, cost the Vietminh dearly in South Vietnam at the beginning of the struggle. As we have noted, Ho Chi Minh's guerrilla forces had taken virtual control of the country with the surrender of the Japanese occupation forces of the Second World War. In part because of the defection of the

religious sects, the French armoured forces landing in South Vietnam met little opposition. Within a few months, they held much of what was then called Cochin China, Vietnam's southernmost state, of which Saigon is the capital.

Only the lack of manpower – 40,000 troops under the command of General Leclerc comprised the initial expeditionary force – prevented them from seizing the flatlands of Annam and Tonkin as well.

As the late Bernard Fall (*Street Without Joy* and *The Two Viet Nams*) remarked, French objectives in Indo-China in 1946 'envisioned little more than a campaign of colonial reconquest along classic lines, like Marshal Lyautey's campaign against Abd el Krim's Riff Kabyles in the 1920s'.

The method chosen was the so-called 'oil-slick technique'. It involved the establishment of strong points in a region, from which 'pacification' forces would spread out to cut the countryside into small squares and then to comb each square on the grid, working from the outside, until the rebel forces within the net were finally brought to close quarters and exterminated. It is, in effect, a police method. The trouble was that Leclerc did not have a sufficient number of policemen for the *ratissage*, the combining without which the whole plan falls to pieces.

The French campaign fitted a pattern typical of what must be expected to happen when regular military forces try to combat guerrillas as though they were a conventional military enemy, or, on the other hand, treat them as mere roving bandits, to be dispersed by flying columns and picked off one by one.

Leclerc's armoured columns rushed in, seized the major roads and the important crossroad towns, and felt that they had made a successful start, since they met little determined resistance at any point.

What they failed to realize initially was that, although they controlled the roads, they were fighting an enemy that had no need of roads, being without transport or heavy artillery to move. They seized strong points, but these strong points commanded nothing, since the enemy was not stationary but fluid and offered no contest for strong points or for territory.

The French controlled the roads. The guerrillas passed safely in the jungle and rice paddies on either side at a distance of one hundred yards, unseen. The French held the towns. The enemy had no design on the towns. For where the French were fighting to control the national territory – that meant to occupy it – the guerrillas were interested only in winning its population. Note:

this is the essential contrast between conventional war and guerrilla war. The army fights to occupy territory, roads, strategic heights, vital areas; the guerrilla fights to control people, without whose co-operation the land is useless to its possessor.

The oil-slick pattern, better for catching bandits than for fighting guerrillas, might actually have been used to some advantage in Indo-China, had the French commanded more troops to devote to the campaign. But in a revolutionary situation – moreover one in which foreign troops oppose native guerrillas – the suppression campaign could only work locally. What is the method of preventing new outbreaks, short of exterminating entire populations? It has yet to be discovered. The Vietnamese casualties that fell before the French were very high, the death toll heavy during eight years of bitter internal war. Dr Fall estimated Vietminh casualties at three times those of the French Union Forces, putting the latter at 172,000. Yet there is strong evidence that the great bulk of the native casualties were not guerrillas but civilians.

The French drive was doomed to failure. The country was too big, the population was too great, and there was too much natural cover for the guerrillas; the French forces were far too small for an effort that requires a minimum ratio of ten soldiers for every guerrilla, and may very well need twenty or one hundred in a land where *every* native is a potential guerrilla fighter.

Vietminh troops were organized on three levels, according to the pattern established in China and used elsewhere. At the top were the so-called *chu-luc* regulars, permanent guerrilla fighters who could be employed strategically wherever needed and who carried the main campaign, when insurgent forces were concentrated for a major strike. Beneath the *chu-luc* were the regional guerrillas, who fought only in their own zones, and could always return to their civilian character as peasants and workers if hard pressed. And on the bottom level were the village militia, the *du-kich*, guerrillas by night and peasants by day, carrying out limited assignments – sabotaging a bridge here, ambushing a patrol there, mining the roads, carrying messages or funds – and fading back into their farms and villages at the first approach of military opposition.

At the first shots of the imperialist invasion, [writes General Giap.] General Leclerc . . . estimated that the reoccupation of Vietnam would be a military walk-over. When encountering resistance in the South, the French generals considered it weak and temporary and stuck to their opinion that it would take ten weeks at most to occupy and pacify the whole of South Vietnam.

Why did the French colonialists make such an estimate? Because they considered that to meet their aggression, there must be an army . . . it was not possible for them to understand a fundamental and decisive fact: the Vietnamese Army, although weak materially, was a people's army . . . In provoking hostilities, the colonialists had alienated a whole nation. And indeed, the whole Vietnamese nation, the entire Vietnamese people, rose against them. Unable to grasp this profound truth, the French generals, who believed in an easy victory, went instead to certain defeat.

Allowing for rhetorical exaggeration, there is still much in what Giap says. The French forces, concentrating on strong points and other objectives of conventional warfare strategy, found themselves 'submerged in a sea of armed people'. The arms, in the main, came from the French Expeditionary Corps, which, says Giap, 'became, unwittingly, the supplier of the Vietnam People's Army with French, even U.S. arms'.

As for the organization of the resistance, Giap notes that it was primarily *political* and only secondarily military:

Our party advocated that, to launch the people's war, it was necessary to have three kinds of armed forces. It attached great importance to the building and development of self-defence units and guerrilla units. Militia was set up everywhere. *Thanks to the founding of [the] people's administration everywhere in the countryside, and the existence of Party branches in every place*, the militia spread far and wide and the people rose to fight. In the enemy's rear, guerrilla units, in co-ordination with the regular army, scattered and wore out the enemy, nailed them to their bases, so that our regular army could launch mobile fighting to annihilate them. They turned the enemy rear into our front line and built guerrilla bases as starting points for our regular army's offensive, right in the heart of the enemy. They protected the people and their property, fought the enemy and kept up production, and frustrated the enemy's schemes to use war to feed war and Vietnamese to fight Vietnamese. In the free zones, guerrilla units effectively fought the enemy and kept watch on traitors; *they were effective instruments for the local administration and local Party*; at the same time, they were the shock force in production, transport, and supply. Through combat and work, the guerrilla units became an inexhaustible and precious source of replenishment for the regular army, supplying it with men and officers who were politically well educated and rich in fighting experience. [Italics author's.]

Both sides made serious mistakes in the early phase of the eight-year struggle. The French, for their part, devoted a full five months of 1947 to the fruitless task of attempting to capture Ho Chi Minh and his staff, thinking in this way to cut short the war. The effort

was wasted. Even if they had captured Ho, it probably would not have affected the course of a war, the outcome of which depended not on individual military genius but on a strategy dictated by the politico-military situation – a strategy that any communist leader, aware of the lesson of China, would have applied.

Here it may be well to observe that, to a very great extent, guerrillas fight as they do because they must. Their situation determines their course of action. Lacking the heavy weapons and disciplined divisions with which to fight conventional military campaigns, they are confined, as Clausewitz puts it, to nibbling at the edges of the opposing army and fighting in the enemy's rear areas. Materially unable to face a military decision, they must of necessity await a political decision. In a revolutionary situation, political decisions will tend to favour their side, since these will come in the course of a protracted war which the enemy is neither politically nor psychologically able to stand, whatever the condition of his military forces.

As General Giap analysed the situation of the French:

The enemy will pass slowly from the offensive to the defensive. The blitzkrieg will transform itself into a war of duration. Thus, the enemy will be caught in a dilemma: he has to drag out the war in order to win it, and does not possess, on the other hand, the psychological and political means to fight a long-drawn-out war . . .

Giap, of course, proved to be correct. Political pressures in France, the low morale of the pro-French sector of public opinion in Vietnam, and the sagging morale of the troops themselves as the war dragged on, seriously weakened the efforts of the Expeditionary Corps.

The country was swarming with guerrilla militia; units were organized in virtually every village. Vietminh regulars were making rapid forced marches through the jungle to strike a French column here, a small garrison there, and were rapidly arming new units with weapons seized from the enemy, as well as heavier equipment smuggled from China.

By the end of 1949, the French had lost the initiative and the Vietminh had seized it to such an extent that the latter were able to launch a limited offensive with fifteen battalions, sealing off part of the Red River delta in Tonkin from the Thai highlands.

In the spring, a larger offensive was launched against French defences in the Red River Valley, and by summer the entire north-eastern corner of Tonkin had been converted into a Vietminh stronghold.

Political pressures in France predictably worked for the Vietminh. In August 1950, the French government actually ordered a *reduction* of the French forces in Indo-China by 9,000 troops, ignoring the military realities of the situation there entirely; and the National Assembly, yielding to popular anti-war sentiment at home, required assurances that no military conscripts would be used in Indo-China. In other words, it was to be a police action carried out by professionals, principally Foreign Legion, Moroccan, and other non-French troops.

The inevitable result was a further weakening of the French war effort, and a new offensive on the part of the Vietminh. An entire string of garrisons in northern Tonkin were cut off from their base. A Moroccan task force of 3,500 men and a garrison force of 2,600 men and 500 civilians seeking to escape from the entrapment were ambushed and destroyed; and three battalions of paratroopers sent to their rescue met the same fate.

In *The Two Viet-Nams*, Bernard Fall writes:

By the end of the month of October, 1950, almost the whole northern half of Viet-Nam had become a Vietminh redoubt, into which the French were – with the brief exception of a paratroop raid on Lang-Song in July, 1953 – never to penetrate again . . .

When the smoke had cleared, the French had suffered their greatest colonial defeat since Montcalm had died at Quebec. They had lost 6,000 troops, 13 artillery pieces and 125 mortars, 450 trucks and three armoured platoons, 940 machineguns, 1,200 submachineguns, and more than 8,000 rifles. Their abandoned stocks alone sufficed for the equipment of a whole . . . Viet-Minh division.*

'For the French,' Fall concludes, 'the Indo-China War was lost then and there. That it was allowed to drag on inconclusively for another four years is a testimony to the shortsightedness of the civilian authorities who were charged with drawing the political conclusions from the hopeless military situation. American military aid – the first trickle of which had made its appearance in the form of seven transport planes in June 1950, after the Korean War had broken out – was to make no difference whatever in the eventual outcome of the war.'

The progress of the Vietminh was slowed to some extent by General Giap's premature decision, at the end of 1950, to begin a general offensive. The attempt to force the campaign into Mao's decisive third stage of revolutionary war, the strategic offensive, when the situation was not yet ripe, cost the Vietminh heavily. In

* Pall Mall Press.

a single clash in the Red River delta area, 16-17 January, Giap lost 6,000 men. When he tried to seize the port of Haiphong in March 1951, he was again defeated. And in June, a third drive for control of the delta likewise failed.

Thereafter, the Vietminh wisely transferred their efforts to more promising objectives; in particular, to control of the highland areas, where heavy artillery, air power, and armour could not be brought fully into play, and the French had to fight on the Vietminh's terms.

The key military problem of the French in Indo-China was lack of manpower; their main political problem was lack of support on the home front. Diplomatic pressures added to these problems. Vietminh strategy was flexible; that of the French was comparatively rigid, so that time and again the Expeditionary Corps was caught off balance.

Lack of manpower meant that too few troops were required to cover too much territory, with the result that the Corps was unable to meet the lightning blows of fast-moving Vietminh mobile divisions when these concentrated for an offensive. And when the French themselves went on the offensive and tried to concentrate their forces to seize the initiative in a given sector, Vietminh guerrilla action elsewhere along the line made them spread out again. Moreover, Vietminh strategy, being political as well as military, was designed to increase the political and psychological pressure on the enemy, and was signally successful in accomplishing this objective.

The point is well illustrated by Giap's invasion of Laos in the early spring of 1953. The invasion was launched with three Vietminh divisions, supported internally by some 4,000 Pathet-Lao guerrillas. In opposition were only 3,000 French troops, backed by the Laotian Army of 10,000 men.

Rather than sacrifice the thinly manned frontier garrisons, the French command ordered them to withdraw, leaving only a single battalion to offer rear-guard resistance. The battalion was lost; only four men survived. Another garrison retreating inland lost all but 180 of its 2,400 troops in a disastrous fighting withdrawal.

Reinforcements airlifted into Laos from Vietnam stemmed the invasion on the Plaine des Jarres, but at the cost of further depleting the French reserves in the main area of hostilities and tying up all available French air transport. The Vietminh were beaten back, but the campaign was, from their point of view, far from a wasted effort.

As Katzenbach comments in 'Time, Space, and Will':

... the results of this action, whether the whole of the intended result was achieved or not, were as far-reaching as if a major victory had been won. Seldom has so much been accomplished with so little.

Perhaps in the cold light of afterthought, the most curious aspect of the whole action was that from the beginning it made a mockery of the old saying, 'Nothing risked; nothing gained.' Whatever the gain, no military investment of sizable proportions was risked. This was quite as safe a venture, in a word, as the Chinese invasion of Tibet.

Yet after a three-week invasion, this is what the communists had accomplished: (1) They had thrown terror into the French (military and civil authorities alike) in both Indo-China and metropolitan France; (2) they had spread French defending forces in Indo-China even thinner than previously; (3) they had produced renewed demands for a larger measure of political autonomy in both Laos and nearby Cambodia; (4) they had created a situation in which French spending in the area was raised by some \$60 million; and (5) they had cost the United States some \$460 million extra by way of foreign aid.

One of the most interesting accounts of revolutionary warfare that has been written is Vo Nguyen Giap's own account of the Vietminh strategy used to block the well-publicized Navarre Plan - France's last-gasp effort, as it turned out, to regain the military initiative in Indo-China.

The plan conceived by the latest of a succession of French commanders-in-chief, General Henri Navarre, envisioned a strategic offensive designed, as the late John Foster Dulles assured a committee of the United States Senate, to 'break the organized body of communist aggression* by the end of the 1955 fighting season [in eighteen months]'.

Navarre conceded privately, in a secret report not published until long after the battle of Dien Bien Phu, that the war in Indo-China was already lost when the Navarre Plan went into effect; the best that could be hoped for, even at that time, was a stalemate.

Be that as it may, the Plan was put into operation, with powerful financial and material assistance from the United States.

Navarre's strategy was to concentrate strong mobile forces in the Red River delta in an effort to engage and wear down the main body of the Vietminh, during the fall and winter of 1953, while at

* Note the phrase, 'communist aggression' - this after the Vietnamese had been fighting a French *invasion* for more than seven years. But Dulles' attitude towards the struggle, in which perhaps 200,000 Vietnamese lives were lost, is betrayed by the sportsman's reference to 'the 1955 fighting season'. Everything has its season, even fighting communist 'aggression' and killing Vietnamese.

the same time occupying Dien Bien Phu, to the west, as a spring-board from which to launch powerful stabs at communist free zones in the surrounding area. With the spring of 1954, the Vietminh presumably being exhausted by this time, the French were to speed other, newly formed units to seize Vietminh free zones in South Vietnam, this mop-up to be followed by a general offensive in the North that would bring the war to a successful conclusion.

Forty-four French mobile battalions were concentrated in the Red River delta for the first phase of this operation, during the fall of 1953, and a series of fierce battles followed. In January, French paratroopers occupied Dien Bien Phu and a powerful build-up there began.

The Vietminh, meanwhile, launched their counter-offensive, encircling Dien Bien Phu, joining forces with the Pathet Lao for a stab into upper Laos, followed in January by an offensive in the western highlands and two further thrusts into Laos, one in the south and the other in the north, the latter liberating the Nam Hu basin and threatening the Laotian capital, Luang Prabang.

In March, as the French regrouped to resume their own offensive, the Vietminh opened their historic 55-day assault on Dien Bien Phu.

'The strategic direction of the Dien Bien Phu campaign and of the winter 1953-spring 1954 campaign in general' writes General Giap, 'was a typical success of the revolutionary military line of Marxism-Leninism applied to the actual conditions of the revolutionary war in Vietnam.'

Our strategy started from thorough analysis of the enemy's contradictions. It aimed at concentrating our forces in the enemy's relatively exposed sectors, annihilating their manpower, liberating a part of the territory, and compelling them to scatter their forces, thus creating favourable conditions for a decisive victory.

For the French Expeditionary Corps, the war was a continuous process of dispersal of forces. The enemy divisions were split into regiments, then into battalions, companies, and platoons, to be stationed at thousands of points and posts on the various battle fronts of the Indo-China theatre of operations. The enemy found himself face to face with a contradiction. Without scattering his forces, it would be impossible for him to occupy the invaded territory; in scattering his forces, he put himself in difficulties. The scattered units would fall easy prey to our troops, their mobile forces would be more and more reduced, and the shortage of troops would be all the more acute. On the other hand, if they concentrated their forces to move from the defensive position and cope with us with more initiative, the occupation

forces would be weakened and it would be difficult for them to hold the invaded territory. *Now, if the enemy gives up occupied territory, the very aim of the war of reconquest is defeated.* [Italics author's.]

The objectives of the Navarre plan have already been stated. In preparing to put the plan into operation, the French found themselves faced with a dilemma: they could not go on the offensive without concentrating their manpower, yet would be unable to defend the many weak links in the strategic chain of defensive posts if they did concentrate it. Lack of manpower was the crippling factor. To make up for the deficiency, new units were formed (many consisted of Vietnamese recruits, or, as the Vietminh insisted, mercenaries), and existing units stationed at posts that were considered 'static' were secretly shifted for the big build-up in the Red River delta.

Needless to say, the Navarre Plan confronted the Vietminh with the necessity of making serious decisions, too. Giap recounts the dilemma:

The concrete problem was: the enemy was concentrating in the Red River delta, and launching attacks on our free zones. Now, should we concentrate our forces to face the enemy, or mobilize them for attacks in other directions? . . . In concentrating our forces to fight the enemy in the Delta, we could defend our free zone; but here the enemy was still strong and we could easily be decimated. On the other hand, in attacking in other directions with our main forces, we could exploit the vulnerable points of the enemy to annihilate the bulk of their forces; but our free zone would thus be threatened.

The Communist Party's Central Committee put its collective mind to the problem, Giap soberly relates, and came up with a slogan: 'Dynamism, initiative, mobility, and rapidity of decision in the face of new situations'. While less than informative, the slogan did have meaning, as Giap explains:

Keeping the initiative, we should concentrate our forces to attack strategic points which were relatively vulnerable. If we succeeded in keeping the initiative, we could achieve successes and compel the enemy to scatter their forces . . . On the other hand, if we were driven on the defensive, not only could we not annihilate many enemy forces, but our own force could easily suffer losses . . .

A dynamic campaign was decided upon.

Always convinced that the essential thing was to destroy the enemy's manpower, the Central Committee worked out its plan of action by scientific analysis: to concentrate our offence against important strategic points where the enemy were relatively weak in order to wipe out a

part of their manpower, at the same time compelling them to scatter their forces to cope with us at vital points which they had to defend at all costs.

This strategy proved correct. While the enemy was concentrating big forces in the Delta to threaten our free zone, instead of leaving our main forces in the Delta or scattering our forces in the free zone to defend it by a defensive action, we regrouped our forces and boldly attacked in the direction of the northwest.

The result was the destruction, says Giap, of 'thousands of local bandits [armed by the French]' and the liberation of four strategic strong points, the destruction of the greater part of a French column, and the encirclement of Dien Bien Phu, 'thus compelling the enemy to carry out in haste a reinforcement movement to save it from being wiped out'. Giap adds a significant observation: 'In addition to the Red River delta, Dien Bien Phu [thus] became a second point of concentration of enemy forces.'

At the same time, the Middle Laos offensive was in progress, forcing the French to rush more reinforcements in another direction and to weaken further the build-up in the delta, while creating a third point of concentration at the threatened air base of Seno.

Further diversions were created, including a Vietminh assault on the western highlands and the offensive in Upper Laos, sending French reinforcement speeding in two new directions.

For us [writes Giap] the first phase of the winter-spring campaign was a series of offensives launched simultaneously on various important sectors where the enemy were relatively exposed, in which we annihilated part of the enemy's forces and liberated occupied areas, at the same time compelling the enemy to scatter their forces in many directions. We continually kept the initiative in the operations and drove the enemy on the defensive. . . . On the main battlefield, we pinned down the enemy at Dien Bien Phu, thus creating favourable conditions for our troops on other battlefields.

The result of the Vietminh strategy was to relieve pressure on the free zones, to such an extent that 'our compatriots could go to work . . . even in daytime without being molested by enemy aircraft', and to keep the French too busy and too scattered for the local mopping-up operations which the Navarre Plan had envisioned as the prelude to a general offensive against the main body of Vietminh forces in the North. In consequence, guerrilla areas behind the French lines in South Vietnam were never eliminated, and with this constant threat, added to the pressure on encircled Dien Bien Phu, French hopes of regaining the initiative quickly faded.

The Navarre Plan was smashed before it could be fairly put into operation. The destruction of the fortified camp at Dien Bien Phu and the surrender of what remained of its garrison – at full strength it had consisted of seventeen infantry battalions, three artillery battalions, plus various engineer tank units and paratroops, defending forty-nine concrete strongposts – was the decisive blow.

The battle lasted for fifty-five days. 'At 0153 local time, on May 8, 1954,' writes Bernard Fall, 'the last guns fell silent at Dien Bien Phu after a desperate bayonet charge of the Algerian and Foreign Legion garrison of strongpoint 'Isabelle' had been smothered by sheer numbers of the victorious Vietminh, and the war that had lasted eight years was almost over.'

A military survey team sent to Saigon from France to learn the extent of the disaster recommended that the French abandon North Vietnam as a lost cause and, if they could, hold the area below the 17th parallel. The diplomatic settlement in Geneva that followed, bringing peace to Vietnam – but not permanent peace – ratified the military decision.

'The Indochina War ended on July 21, 1954, at 0343,' writes Fall, ever precise. 'It had cost the French Union Forces a total of 172,000 casualties and forever broken France's hold on Viet-Nam.'

6 The political character of the Second Indo-China War. The American role. Expansion of the war.

The silence that follows the fall of Dien Bien Phu is but a moment in the span of history, an all-too-brief breathing spell. Scarcely five years separate the first Indo-China War, as Bernard Fall called it, from the second. The collapse of the Geneva Accords, resulting from Washington's intervention in Saigon and the repudiation of the Geneva agreement for a national plebiscite to determine the political future of the two Vietnams was followed by the formation of the National Liberation Front, and a new guerrilla campaign. Again Vietnam became the focal point of global concern, the storm centre of a vast political conflict, a clash of ideologies and empires threatening major war in Asia, or worse.

Yet from a certain point of view, little seemed to have changed. To the peasant looking up from his rice paddies, the war planes whining overhead on their way to distant targets in the North, the helicopters clattering towards some battle rendezvous, were indistinguishable from the planes and helicopters that had carried French troops into battle a decade earlier. To the guerrilla in the brush, today's battle was like that of yesterday and last year and the year before that: the war was all of a piece, and young men could not remember, in their lifetimes, when there had been no war.

American uniforms had replaced French uniforms in Saigon; directives came from Washington instead of Paris. The Vietminh were now the Viet Cong; and the new invaders, at first called advisers, then openly combatants, spoke English instead of French. It made little difference, except for the greater size of the invasion force and the superiority and profusion of its equipment, the wider, deadlier air war, the increased ferocity of the military machine, and the apparently inexhaustible wealth of the enemy across the sea. The war continued, both sides pursuing the same objectives as before; on the one side, relentless determination to dominate at any cost; on the other, defiance: a small, primitive nation resisting

civil population in the northern mountains, the terrorism practised against civilians, their dependence on foreign bases and supplies, and their premature decision in 1948 to hold ground and to expose large formations to a numerically, technologically, logistically, and organizationally superior army cost them a series of defeats from which there was no recovery.

Their loss was twofold. They were defeated militarily. And the Greek army's success spelled defeat for the revolutionary movement politically, as well.

In the Greek context, the revolutionary principle bears repetition: the object of the guerrilla is not to win battles, but to avoid defeat, not to end the war, but to prolong it, until political victory, more important than any battlefield victory, has been won. In sacrificing the advantages of guerrilla tactics for military strategy based on territorial investment, the Greek communists opposed strength with weakness. In risking a military confrontation, they gambled not only their available manpower, but something more important – their political prestige as a revolutionary force able to defy (by skilful evasion and superior tactics) the military colossus. And in losing the gamble, they lost the essential momentum, the high sense of popular anticipation, the bandwagon effect, on which the success of any political movement depends.

Revolution is by definition a mass phenomenon. Greece, Malaya, the Philippines all illustrate the axiom that without mass participation, or at least popular support, there can be no revolution. The Huks lost it, the Chinese in Malaya never had it, the Greek communists threw it away.

10 Sun Tzu on The Art of War. Principles of guerrilla strategy and tactics. Terrain as a determining factor. Guerrilla war in urban areas. The character of the guerrilla.

All warfare is based on deception.

Therefore, when capable, feign incapacity; when active, inactivity.

When near, make it appear that you are far away; when far away, that you are near.

Offer the enemy a bait to lure him; feign disorder and strike him.

When he concentrates, prepare against him; where he is strong, avoid him.

Anger his general and confuse him.

Pretend inferiority and encourage his arrogance.

Keep him under a strain and wear him down.

When he is united, divide him.

Attack where he is unprepared; sally out when he does not expect you.

These are the strategist's keys to victory.

The quotation above is taken from Sun Tzu's essays on *The Art of War*, the oldest known writing on the subject, pre-dating the Christian era by several centuries. The striking resemblance to the military axioms of Mao Tse-tung is no coincidence. Mao has studied Sun Tzu thoroughly and acknowledges his debt; many of the Chinese guerrilla leader's dicta are, in fact, mere paraphrases of those of *The Art of War*.

Sun Tzu is quoted here to make a point. It is that 'modern warfare' is, in its most common usage, a cant phrase, indicative of the confusion of journalists and politicians who mistake technology for science. For despite the impressive technological innovations of the twentieth century, the principles of warfare are not modern but ancient; they were well established when Caesar marched out on his first campaign. And what is true of war in general is even more true, if possible, of guerrilla warfare in particular.

Aircraft and artillery provide weapons of far greater range than the longbow; explosives formidably multiply the striking power of the arrow; tanks are better than shields; trucks and helicopters offer (but not always) swifter and more dependable transportation

than mules and camels. The problems of generalship remain the same. The variable factors of terrain, weather, space, time, population, and, above all, of morale and strategy still determine the outcome of battles and campaigns.

If there is anything new about guerrilla war – of which Sun Tzu surprisingly anticipates by two thousand years virtually all questions of a military nature – it is only in its modern, political application. To put it another way, the specifically modern aspect of guerrilla warfare is in its use as a tool of political revolution – the single sure method by which an unarmed population can overcome mechanized armies, or, failing to overcome them, can stalemate them and make them irrelevant.

To understand how this comes about does not require a study of military tactics so much as of the political problems to which military methods – guerrilla methods – may provide a solution.

The guerrilla is a political insurgent, the conscious agent of revolution; his military role, while vital, is only incidental to his political mission. His insurgency is dedicated to a single purpose: the overthrow of the government and the destruction of the existing political or social or, it may be, economic system.

In the process of accomplishing his goal, he may have to defeat – and he will certainly have to engage and out-manoeuvre – organized, professional military forces. If so, however, his manoeuvres, except where immediate survival is at stake, will be undertaken primarily for their political effect. Each battle will be a lesson, designed to demonstrate the impotence of the army and so to discredit the government that employs it. Each campaign will be a text, intended to raise the level of revolutionary awareness and anticipation of the popular majority whose attitude will determine the outcome of the struggle.

Guerrilla actions will have certain obvious military objectives: to obtain weapons, ammunition and supplies, to inflict casualties, to force the enemy to overextend his lines so that his communications may be disrupted and small units picked off, one at a time, by locally superior rebel forces.

But psychological and political objectives will be paramount. Local military success will serve no purpose if the guerrilla campaign does not also weaken the morale of the government and its soldiers, strain the financial resources of the regime, and increase political pressure on it by creating widespread apprehension and dissatisfaction with the progress of a war in which there is no progress – and no end in sight.

Obviously, none of this can occur except in the presence of certain distinct social and political conditions, which combine to

produce a potentially revolutionary situation. Successful insurgency presupposes the existence of valid popular grievances, sharp social divisions, an unsound or stagnant economy, an oppressive government. These factors obtaining, revolution will still be far off, unless there exists or comes into existence the nucleus of a revolutionary organization, capable of articulating and exploiting popular dissatisfaction with the *status quo*.

Ordinarily, however, revolutionary situations produce their own revolutionary leadership. Coming from the most unstable social sectors, it can be expected to include the most radical, most frustrated and ambitious elements of the political 'out' parties, the more idealistic and least successful members of the middle class, and those most outraged by the *unaccustomed* pinch of oppression. (The long-tyrannized peasant, for example, is seldom as revolutionary as the relatively fortunate student or worker who has been led to believe that he has rights, and finds, in a change of political climate, that he is deprived of them.)

In the potentially revolutionary situation, spontaneous insurrections may be expected: they are likely to arise out of almost any sort of social conflict – a strike, an election campaign, a dispute over land or wages or prices or rents or schools or any one of a score of other social 'problems'. Often they will come in reaction to some act of repression or of real or fancied injustice on the part of the governing authorities as, for example, when the efforts of the police to curb a popular demonstration turn the demonstration into a riot.

In other circumstances, disorder may be deliberately created. In Cuba, Algeria, Cyprus, as examples that come readily to mind, the war of the flea was initiated by the deliberate acts of the revolutionary nucleus, proclaiming its defiance of authority and banking on popular support in an open declaration of revolutionary war.

The means are not important. The important element is the leadership itself. Bandits are not revolutionaries, looters are not guerrillas. In order to attract a following, the revolutionary leaders must stand on firm moral ground; they must have some greater purpose than the furtherance of personal ambition. This in turn implies an ideology or a clear 'cause' to explain their decisions and the reasons of their insurgency. They cannot be mere opportunists.

When conflict occurs, whether spontaneous or induced, the revolutionary leaders must be capable of explaining and rationalizing its confused and often apparently accidental character. Isolated acts of defiance must be given coherence within a revolutionary frame of reference. The leadership must be prepared to make the most of every opportunity to accelerate the process of social

ferment and political disruption. The first task of the revolutionary cadres must be to relate each incident and each phase of the conflict to a great 'cause', so that revolutionary violence is seen as the natural and moral means to a desired end, and the masses of the people are increasingly involved. The struggle cannot be allowed to seem meaningless or chaotic. It must be given a progressive character in all its phases; it must arouse great expectations and appear crucial at every stage, so that no one can stand outside of it.

The precise 'cause' itself is not of great consequence: one is often as good as another. In Cuba, for example, the corruption of the Batista regime and its illegitimacy were seemingly sufficient 'causes' for the well-to-do middle class – so long as its members individually did not take any great personal risk, but merely sympathized with and abetted the active revolutionaries. When the sons of the middle class were imprisoned or killed or tortured for their activities, oppression became the more urgent 'cause'.

Economic nationalism was the real 'cause' of the rich and ambitious industrialists and entrepreneurs who opposed Batista. Political ambition, which could not be avowed, and a sense of social injustice, which could, were the 'causes' that drove the frustrated youths of the poor white-collar class to become the cadres and greatest zealots of the revolution. And on the other hand, the landless *campesinos*, the economically deprived *macheteros* of the great sugar plantations, the squatters of the Sierra Maestra were driven by actual hunger, by real oppression, and by a longing for the security of land of their own under a just social system – motivations that transcended any question of moral or political 'causes'.

The nominal causes varied according to the local situation. The constant, consistent appeal of the revolutionary leadership was broader, being based on a democratic, egalitarian ideology linked to notions of social justice long accepted in Cuba (there was nothing new about Castro's brand of 'humanism', it was written into the Cuban constitution), and a clear political goal – the overthrow of the Batista regime and the complete destruction of or severance from everything that supported it.

The overthrow of Batista was presented as a panacea, the remedy of all existing evils. As a 'cause', it related and made understandable each isolated political development: the assassination of a policeman, the martyrdom of a terrorist, the suspension of civil liberties or a public demonstration demanding their restoration, any disruption of the ordinary routine, anything that helped to undermine the regime, was held up as a skirmish or a battle in a great crusade.

This state of mind prevailing, the process of cutting away Batista's support and increasing the pressure against him both inside and outside of the country continued according to a pattern that we have already examined in detail in earlier chapters.

The Cuban example provides as well as any other the recipe for successful insurgency. The prerequisites are the following:

1. An unstable political situation, marked by sharp social divisions and usually, but not always, by a foundering or stagnant economy.
2. A political objective, based on firm moral and ideological grounds, that can be understood and accepted by the majority as the overriding 'cause' of the insurgency, desirable in itself and worthy of any sacrifice.
3. An oppressive government, with which no political compromise is possible.
4. Some form of revolutionary political organization, capable of providing dedicated and consistent leadership towards the accepted goal.

There is one final requirement: the clear possibility or even the probability of success. Until people believe that a government *can* be overthrown – and it must be the first act of the insurgency to demonstrate this possibility by successful defiance of military force – the attempt will not be made, the revolutionary following will not be found.

The specific techniques or tactics of guerrilla warfare are not, except in unimportant detail, to be learned from texts. They relate always to the specific local situation and are supremely expedient: the guerrilla is, above all, an improviser. The nature of his improvisation depends, naturally, on immediate and long-range objectives, the terrain, the relative strength of his forces and those of the enemy, the material means at his disposal, and similar factors.

Since the guerrilla's numerical strength and arms are inferior to those of his enemy (or he would not be a guerrilla), and since his most immediate concern is mere survival, the basis of all guerrilla tactics is, obviously, evasion. Successful evasion means the ability to avoid confrontation except at one's own choosing yet always to be able to achieve the *local* superiority to strike with effect.

'If I am able to determine the enemy's disposition while at the same time I conceal my own,' writes Sun Tzu, 'then I can concentrate and he must divide. And if I concentrate while he divides, I can use my entire strength to attack a fraction of his.'

And again:

'The enemy must not know where I intend to give battle. For if he does not know where I intend to give battle, he must prepare in a great many places. And when he prepares in a great many places, those I have to fight in any one place will be few. . . . *And when he prepares everywhere, he will be weak everywhere.*'

The foregoing explains, as well as anything that has ever been written, how it is possible for a relative handful of armed men to oppose a vastly superior army. The secrets of success are, first, superior intelligence, and, second, terrain. Guerrillas, representing a popular cause, have the tremendous advantage of an intelligence service that encompasses virtually the entire population. The population hides them, and at the same time it reveals, from day to day and hour to hour, the disposition and strength of the enemy.

'We always know where the soldiers are,' Fidel Castro told me when I first interviewed him in the Sierra Maestra, early in 1957, 'but they never know where we are. We can come and go as we like, moving through their lines, but they can never find us unless we wish them to, and then it is only on our terms.*'

At the time, Castro had perhaps one hundred guerrillas at his disposal; in theory, he was 'surrounded' by some five thousand Batista soldiers. But in the wild and trackless terrain of the Sierra Maestra, roaming over some five thousand square miles of mountains and dense forest among a rural populace surely sympathetic to him and hostile to Batista, his being 'surrounded' was an irrelevance. The ocean is surrounded, but the fish do not care.

Where a choice of ground is possible, the terrain for guerrilla operations should be carefully selected. The ideal will be found in a country that is more rural than urban, mountainous rather than flat, thickly forested rather than bare, with extensive railway lines, bad roads, and an economy that is preponderantly agricultural rather than industrial. The relative dispersion or concentration of the population is also of great importance: a region with a widely scattered rural population, living in small hamlets and isolated farm dwellings is much more vulnerable than one of tightly knit, large country towns separated by wide areas of open farmland.

The terrain should afford both natural concealment and obstacles to hinder the movement of military transport – mountains and swamps where tanks and trucks cannot go, woods and thick brush that provide cover from aerial observation and attack, forests from which to strike quickly and safely at enemy rail and highway communications and in which to ambush small military units.

* Robert Taber, *M—26: The Biography of a Revolution*.

There should be sufficient space to manoeuvre freely, without the danger of being caught in a closing spiral of encirclement. The greater the area of operations, the more difficult it will be for the army to locate the guerrillas and the more the government will have to disperse its troops and extend its lines of supply and communication.

Yet the guerrillas cannot choose the remotest and most rugged areas in which they would be safest. They must remain constantly in contact with a rural population from which to recruit, to draw supplies, and to obtain reliable couriers who will carry messages and directions to and from the revolutionary underground in the towns and cities.

This necessity indicates the choice of an area with a dispersed rather than concentrated rural population. Such an area will usually afford the natural concealment and natural obstacles to army operations found in desolate areas, and will provide a further advantage: it will not be economic for the government to garrison.

Large rural towns can be garrisoned; tiny hamlets cannot. Where there are many of them, only a few soldiers can be assigned to each, and to create such rural outposts is worse than useless, since each individual post can easily be overwhelmed, its soldiers captured or killed, their arms and ammunition seized, and another propaganda victory thus scored by the insurgents.

Since there will be no great government stake in any given hamlet, farm, or village, in economic or strategic terms, the natural decision of the army will be to withdraw to safer ground. Yet each such withdrawal will widen the area of guerrilla control and feed the insurgency, providing it with more supplies, more recruits, more room in which to manoeuvre.

There is another consideration: the possession of populated areas will usually provide almost as much safety for the insurgents as would the remote areas in which they cannot be located or attacked. Political considerations, if not those of humanity, will usually offer some safeguard against bombing or artillery attacks, since the government cannot afford to kill civilians indiscriminately.*

The danger of being isolated far from populated areas has been demonstrated by the experience of guerrillas in Malaya and the Philippines. In both instances, the military succeeded in isolating the insurgents, cutting them off from the source of their strength, with results fatal to the insurgency. On the other hand, the possibility of fighting a successful guerrilla war on a small island with little room to manoeuvre and no real wilderness sanctuary has been

* Clearly this does not always hold. Consider Vietnam.

proven by the Cypriot fighters of EOKA. When pressed, the small guerrilla bands commanded by Grivas in the hills of Cyprus would filter back into the towns. The known fugitives who could not do so lived like foxes in earthen dugouts, so well camouflaged that British soldiers often walked above their heads without discovering them. Others sallied forth on night forays from hiding places under the floors of homes where they had lain all day, their presence unsuspected. They were, in the most literal sense, 'underground'.

Even in well policed, large cities, a sympathetic population can protect active insurgents. The Draconian methods used by the French in Algiers virtually stamped out the F.L.N. underground there, but only because the Moslems of the Casbah were already separated, racially and physically, from the French population. Soldiers, especially foreigners, can suppress urban rebellion (as in Budapest) by treating the entire metropolis as a city under wartime siege, controlling all movements, and ruthlessly killing the inhabitants of any quarter where resistance is offered. Gradually an urban population can be starved and terrorized into submission. But such methods scarcely apply to the civil war situation in which there is no sure way of knowing friend from foe.

Terrain and local conditions ultimately decide the size and organization of the guerrilla band. In Cuba's Sierra Maestra, 'columns' of one hundred to one hundred and twenty men proved best, such a force being competent to deal with any military group that might penetrate its base area. Greater numbers were unwieldy on the march and difficult to supply, given the resources of a very thinly populated region with a marginal agricultural economy.

In more densely populated, more prosperous rural areas, a platoon of thirty to forty men would occupy a hamlet or small village and its environs; guard posts were established along the margins of the entire 'territorio libre', and the zone was administered as a state within a state.

In suburban areas, on the other hand, concealment was the determining factor, and the guerrillas who worked close to the larger towns, interdicting the highways and cutting communications and power lines, operated in squads of three to eight men, striking from ambush and then quickly hiding in the brush or, at times, in the homes of residents. Raids on suburban military posts and outlying industrial establishments were often made by commandos living within the town, who would assemble for a night action and then quickly disperse to their homes, to resume their normal daytime occupations

With respect to the conditions that prevail in most of the Latin American republics, Che Guevara considers that a nucleus of *thirty to fifty* armed men is sufficient to initiate a guerrilla insurgency with good assurance of success. If the nucleus, organized and armed in strictest secrecy, exceeds one hundred and fifty, it should be divided, and the action begun in two regions well apart. When an active guerrilla column grows beyond one hundred or so, it should again be divided, and action begun on a new front. There is a positive as well as a negative reason for this division: the guerrillas are missionaries; their task is not merely to oppose the army but to spread rebellion among the people; and the wider their area of contact with the population, the better for their cause.

The guerrilla nucleus initiates the conflict, if possible, on the edge of a wilderness sanctuary, in a thinly populated agricultural area with a marginal economy, within easy striking distance of strategic targets – railway lines that can be cut, communications that can be disrupted, mining or industrial plants that can be sabotaged, small military or police posts from which arms can be seized. At the same time, urban insurrection of a hit-and-run rather than sustained character is created by the revolutionary underground, so as to give the insurgency a general, national complexion for maximum propaganda effect. It is not enough to rebel: the rebellion must be the object of national attention, too shocking in its initial effects to be ignored by even a controlled press, or quickly explained away, as has been the case with many abortive provincial insurrections, by a government safe in an untroubled capital, far from the scene of battle.

When the first excitement has died away and order has been restored in the towns where uprisings have occurred, the guerrillas can expect the army to bring the battle to them; they will not have to seek it. The government will order a 'bandit suppression' campaign. Troops will be dispatched by motor convoy or airlift to the region of reported guerrilla activity; spotter planes will skim the treetops seeking the insurgents; soldiers will occupy the villages and patrol the roads; foot columns will penetrate deeply into rebel territory, trying to make contact. Helicopters may be used to ferry troops to strategic encampments deep in the forest or mountains from which patrols can fan out in search of the rebels. If the military commander knows what he is about, he may adopt some variation of the French 'oil slick' technique, gridding the region on his map and attempting to clear it a square at a time, driving the guerrillas slowly toward a prepared 'killing zone' (or zones) where their only apparent route of escape will bring them

into the open – much as tigers are driven by beaters into the guns of the hunters.

The 'oil slick' method is theoretically sound, but in practice it is far from foolproof. Since it is a rare government that can admit serious concern over the activities of a small band of guerrillas, the chances are that the military force sent on the suppression campaign will be far from adequate for a task in which a ratio of ten to one is prescribed and five hundred soldiers to each guerrilla would not be at all excessive.*

Regardless of the number of troops involved, the guerrillas will fight according to certain principles. They will not seek to hold ground or to contend with a stronger force, but only to confuse and exhaust it and to inflict casualties on it, without taking casualties in return. The key to this kind of action is the well placed ambush. 'Generally,' writes Sun Tzu, 'he who occupies the field of battle first and awaits his enemy is at ease; he who comes later to the fight and rushes into battle is weary.'

The guerrillas will not give battle until the terrain favours them. Their effort will be to lure the enemy into situations in which numbers are of little account, because the way is too steep and the passage too narrow for more than a few to proceed at a time. When fighting begins, it will be on ground of the rebels' own choosing – preferably from commanding heights with dense cover and limited visibility, where a few determined men can hold up an army.

Ambushes will be prepared in such a manner that a small portion of the advancing military column – its vanguard – will be separated from the rest when firing commences. The fire of the main body of the guerrillas will be concentrated on this vanguard. The object of the ambush must be the complete destruction of the advance group and seizure of its arms and ammunition, the latter task being accomplished while a small guerrilla rear guard delays the rest of the military column.

In this connexion, Che Guevara writes:

When the force of the guerrilla band is small and it is desired above all to detain and slow down the advance of an invading column, groups of snipers, from two to ten in number, should be distributed all around the column at each of the four cardinal points. In this

* In Cuba, in 1961, more than 60,000 Castro militia were used to suppress an insurgency in the Escambray mountains, supplied by CIA airdrops, involving not more than 600 anti-Castro guerrillas with little or no popular support. The ratio of troops to insurgents was thus 100 to 1 or better; the cleanup nevertheless required nearly three months to accomplish.

This is not hearsay; the author was there.

situation, combat can be begun, for example, on the right flank; when the enemy centres his action on that flank and fires on it, shooting will begin at that moment from the left flank; at another moment from the rear guard or from the vanguard, and so forth.

With a very small expenditure of ammunition it is possible to hold the enemy in check indefinitely.

While the column is delayed, the main body of the guerrilla force quickly gathers its military booty and moves on towards the next prepared position, or circles around and steps out in a new direction. The snipers withdraw and rejoin the main force before the troops have recovered sufficiently to launch a counter-attack, all of this occurring within a matter of a few minutes.

The process is repeated again and again. When it has been determined that a military column is sufficiently isolated that the arrival of reinforcements can be delayed for some hours or days, the guerrillas may even attempt an encirclement, or may create the appearance of an encirclement by stationing squads of snipers on commanding ground in such a way as to bring the troops under fire in whichever direction they attempt to move. If the troops launch a determined assault, the guerrillas have only to give way, circle around, regroup, and again withdraw.

The superior mobility and small size of the guerrilla force are its main assets. The danger that they themselves may be encircled is usually more apparent than real.

Night, as Guevara has noted, is the best ally of the guerrilla fighter. Although the Cubans used the phrase, 'encirclement face', to describe the look of someone who was frightened, Castro's guerrillas never suffered a single casualty through encirclement, and Guevara considers it no real problem for a guerrilla force. His prescription: take adequate measures to impede the advance of the enemy until nightfall and then exfiltrate – a relatively simple matter for a small group of men in country well known to them, where the cover is good.

In the first months of the insurgency, when the army is on the offensive, the tactics of ambush and evasion are standard and sufficient. The activities of the army itself are enough to advertise the rebel cause. Mounting military casualties cannot be kept secret. The high cost of the anti-guerrilla campaign will be an embarrassment to the government, which will be hard put to explain what it is doing – and failing to do. And each encounter will strengthen the guerrillas while weakening the morale of their military opponents.

'The guerrilla soldier ought always to have in mind,' writes Guevara, 'that his source of supply of arms is the enemy and that, except in special circumstances, he ought not to engage in a battle that will not lead to the capture of such equipment.'

The enemy vanguard is made a special target of guerrilla fire for a sound psychological reason: to induce the fear, or at any rate the excessive caution, that will paralyse the will and retard the free movement of the enemy. When the soldiers in the first rank invariably are killed, few will wish to be in the vanguard, and without a vanguard there is no movement. (Such reasoning may not always apply to professional troops. Professional officers are trained to accept casualties as the price of battle. Nevertheless it has been a constant complaint of American military advisers in South Vietnam that the Vietnamese field commanders commonly refuse to advance against strong guerrilla positions without artillery support and preparatory air strikes that give the Viet Cong guerrillas time to retire from the field.)

The insurgency continuing, the military may be expected sooner or later to give up the futile pursuit of the guerrilla force and leave it to its wilderness sanctuary, if for no other reason than the political. As has been remarked before, few governments can long sustain the political embarrassment of an expensive and well-publicized campaign in which there is no progress to report. Within a matter of weeks or months, the government will be forced to announce a victory, having failed to produce one. The public outside of the war zone will be informed that the insurrection has been suppressed, the bodies of a few civilian casualties may even be displayed by way of evidence, and the troops will be withdrawn to posts and garrisons in more settled territory, falling back on a strategy of *containment* of the insurrection.

If the insurgency is to succeed, the guerrillas must, of course, refuse to be contained. They will now assume the offensive, taking advantage of their new freedom to organize night raids on the small military outposts that ring their free zone, and using the attacks on such outposts as bait to lure military reinforcements into ambush on the roads.

As successful action provides more arms, new guerrilla units are organized, and new zones of operations opened. Guerrillas filtering through the army lines attack isolated military and police units in the villages on the periphery of their free zone, forcing the army to pull back to reinforce these points. With still more room in which to manoeuvre, rebels occupy the outlying farms, move into

small hamlets that cannot be defended economically. Efforts will now be made to discourage, although not absolutely to prevent, military convoys from entering certain zones. The roads will be mined, tank traps dug, defences in depth constructed so that the troops will have to fight their way into rebel territory through a series of ambushes, the guerrillas at each stage offering light resistance and then falling back on the next position.

As rebel strength grows, the army is confronted with a difficult dilemma. Having superior numbers and heavier arms, it will still be able to enter the rebel zones in strength, but only at the cost of some casualties, and with no advantage, since the ground gained will have no strategic or economic value commensurate with the cost of occupying it. If the troops should remain in force, the guerrillas would simply transfer their operations to another zone: the army cannot be everywhere. Yet if the troops do *not* remain, the territory is, in effect, ceded to the insurgents, who proceed to turn its agricultural economy and its rural population to their own purpose. This is the dilemma of the military commander.

It is, of course, sharpened by political problems. Large chunks of the agricultural economy cannot be surrendered to the insurgents without political consequences. Those whose fortunes are affected – traders, absentee landowners, and the like – will be certain to put pressure on the government to *do* something. They may seek political alternatives. The general public will be excited and divided by the deterioration of the government's position, as it becomes more apparent. The more radical elements of urban society will be emboldened; revolutionary sentiment, stirred up by the underground, will grow stronger and more widespread, and the government will grow progressively more fearful and repressive.

In such circumstances, and considering that no army can occupy *all* of the national territory, the logical and natural course of the regime will be the gradual withdrawal of troops from the countryside to the large centres of population. The rural areas thus will be slowly and reluctantly surrendered to the insurgents. With expanded resources of manpower and material, the insurgency will continue to grow. As it gains strength, guerrilla bands will become guerrilla armies. The larger villages will be captured. The railway bridges will be blown and the highways cut. One by one the towns and then the cities will be isolated, their vital supplies restricted, civilian transport reduced to a trickle. Military convoys may still come and go, but not without peril, and not with any important effect, in a country most of which will already be in the hands of the revolution.

The pattern described above is observable. It has already happened in the Western hemisphere and in Southeast Asia. Certainly it is not the only pattern that revolutionary warfare can follow. Is the United States itself immune? The complexity of modern, urban, heavily industrialized societies makes them extremely vulnerable to wide-scale sabotage, a fact that has not gone unremarked by the extremists of the small but fanatical Black Nationalist movement in the United States. The extent of their commitment may be judged by the February 1965 disclosure of a bizarre plot, said to have been hatched by members of the Black Nationalist Revolutionary Action Movement, to blow up the Statue of Liberty in New York, the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, and the Washington Monument. In an article in *Esquire* published just four months earlier (October 1964) entitled 'The Red Chinese American Negro', the Negro journalist William Worthy reported:

With an eye on expected financial and material support from Asia and Africa, RAM has proclaimed the necessity to utilize 'the three basic principal powers' held by Negroes:

1. The power to stop the machinery of government.
2. The power to hurt the economy.
3. The power of unleashing violence.'

The details were clearly spelled out elsewhere by a Negro leader who has since been linked to RAM. Writing in the monthly newsletter, *The Crusader*, Robert Williams, a former chapter president of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People who fled to Cuba after a racial incident in Monroe, North Carolina, in 1961, pictured the coming black revolution in the United States in the following terms:

When massive violence comes, the U.S.A. will become a bedlam of confusion and chaos. . . . The factory . . . telephone . . . and radio workers will be afraid to report to their jobs. All transportation will grind to a complete standstill. . . . Essential pipelines will be severed and blown up and all manner of sabotage will occur. . . . A clash will occur inside the Army Forces. At U.S. military bases around the world local revolutionaries will side with Afro G.I.'s . . .

The new concept of revolution defies military science and tactics. The new concept is lightning campaigns conducted in highly sensitive urban communities, with the paralysis reaching the small communities and spreading to the farm areas. The old method of guerrilla warfare, as carried out from the hills and countryside, would be ineffective in a powerful country like the U.S.A. Any such force would be wiped out in an hour.

The new concept is to huddle as close to the enemy as possible so as to neutralize his modern and fierce weapons. The new concept . . .

dislocates the organs of harmony and order and reduces central power to the level of a helpless, sprawling octopus. During the hours of day sporadic rioting takes place and massive sniping. Night brings all-out warfare, organized fighting, and unlimited terror against the oppressor and his forces. Such a campaign will bring about an end to oppression and social injustice in the U.S.A. in less than ninety days . . .

Williams quotes from an interview which he claims to have had with one 'Mr Lumumba' (a pseudonym adopted in honour of the murdered Congolese premier, Patrice Lumumba), a purported underground leader with a plan for guerrilla warfare in the United States:

The United States is very vulnerable, economically and physically.

Black youth with the right orientation can stop this entire country. Small bands can damage the eight major dams that supply most of the electricity. Electricity means mass communications.

Gasoline can be poured into the sewer systems in major urban areas and then ignited. This would burn out communication lines in an entire city.

What would emerge from this chaos? Most likely, guerrilla warfare. I don't think the entire white community will fight. . . . But the entire black community will be fighting.

We call the whites 'cream puffs'. We feel that when TV stops, when the telephone no longer rings, their world will almost come to an end. Like during a major air raid, they will stay in the house. They'll sit and wait for television to come on.

There is much exaggeration in all this. Yet the black nationalists have a point: where the will to resist authority exists on a wide scale, the means can be found; nor are urban, industrial societies, however well policed, guerrilla-proof.

The guerrilla succeeds because he survives. He flourishes because his methods are progressive. With a pistol, a machete, or, for that matter, a bow and arrow, he can capture a rifle. With twenty rifles he can capture a machine gun, and with twenty rifles and a machine gun he can capture a military patrol or destroy a convoy that carries five machine guns and fifty thousand rounds of ammunition. With a dozen shovels and a few gallons of gasoline he can destroy a tank, and with its weapons he can shoot down an aeroplane or a helicopter that also carries weapons.

Artillery is useless against him because it never catches up with him. A five-hundred-pound aerial bomb will dig a crater ten feet deep and fifteen feet wide, but it will not disturb a guerrilla in a slit trench ten yards away. A dozen aircraft dropping napalm can splash liquid fire over a hundred acres of woodland, but it will have

no effect unless the guerrillas happen to be in that hundred acres, out of the thousands through which they roam.

Once the war of the flea has reached settled rural regions, even these limited means become ineffective, because aircraft cannot attack guerrillas without killing the civilians whose support the government must win – and they all look alike from the air. Great faith was placed in helicopters, but even these have their limitations. Hovering close to the treetops, they are vulnerable to machine gun and anti-aircraft fire; used as troop carriers, they are easily ambushed; the clearings where they must land can be mined, and there are many other ways of setting traps for them. Even concentrated rifle fire, directed at their directional rotors, can bring them down.

United States military handbooks on irregular warfare techniques discuss various biological and chemical weapons that can be employed against guerrillas. These are recommended especially for situations in which guerrillas have mingled with an innocent civilian population that cannot – or ought not to – be killed.

The object of the so-called biologicals is to induce temporarily incapacitating viral diseases that will reduce the ability of guerrillas to resist attack, so that infantry can rush into a target area and quickly kill or capture them without harming non-combatants – a device, so to speak, for separating the sheep from the goats.

Various non-lethal gases – carried, like the biologicals, in artillery shells or aerial bombs, or sprayed by low-flying planes or helicopters – have been designed for the same purpose, to sicken all within a given target area and so reduce resistance to infantrymen on their arrival, without unnecessary bloodshed.

The concept is certainly humane and logical. In practice it has proved faulty. On the three occasions in which non-lethal gas (a mixture of vomiting gas and tear gas, of the type used to control rioters) was used in South Vietnam during early 1965, the practical results were nil. Twice the gas simply blew away, without any effect. On the third occasion, it sickened a few residents of the target area, but the infantrymen who soon arrived found no guerrillas in the area.

The propaganda effects, on the other hand, were tremendous – and adverse in the extreme. When Washington casually announced in March 1965, that *gas* had been used in Vietnam, the political repercussions were heard around the world within twenty-four hours. The Asian press – especially the Japanese, forever scarred by the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs – was loud in indignation.

London and Paris made diplomatic inquiries. And much of the United States press itself sternly condemned the use of even the most harmless gas as a serious breach of all civilized conventions of warfare, that could lead to who knew what barbarity.

Considering the great effect of the Chinese charges of ‘germ warfare’ against the Americans during the Korean war, and the fresh outcry against gas, it is doubtful that guerrillas will have much to fear from either gas or biological warfare in the near future, especially since the practical military value remains unproven. Other weapons of modern military technology are more frightening. White phosphorous is invariably crippling if not fatal because it burns through to the bone; it will penetrate steel, and nothing extinguishes it but total immersion.

A new, one-thousand-pound parcel bomb opens in the air to strew a hundred anti-personnel bombs over as many yards – a weapon far more effective against guerrillas than the concentrated detonation of a single high-explosive missile.

New amphibious gun carriers can penetrate the deepest swamps and marshes. Infra-red and heat-sensitive sniper scopes detect guerrillas in the dark. A later model operates by magnifying the light of the stars. Mobile radar units can spot infiltrators on the ground at a thousand yards. Silent weapons make the trained guerrilla-hunter patrol even harder to detect than guerrillas themselves.

Yet when all is said and done, even the counter-insurgency experts admit that technology alone can never defeat guerrillas: it can only make their task more difficult and dangerous.

The crux of the struggle is the social and political climate. The flea survives by hopping and hiding; he prevails because he multiplies far faster than he can be caught and exterminated.

The needs of the guerrilla are few: his rifle, a blanket, a square of some impermeable material to shelter him from the rain, a knife, a compass, stout boots – the minimum of ordinary camping equipment. Personal qualifications are greater. Physically, the guerrilla must be strong, with iron legs and sound lungs; temperamentally, he must be a cheerful stoic and an ascetic; he must like the hard life he leads. But what is indispensable is ideological armour. Above all, the revolutionary activist must stand on solid moral ground, if he is to be more than a political bandit.

One is led to believe, as in the case of the Viet Cong, for example, that guerrillas dominate unprotected rural people by threats and terror: it is a convenient thing for country people to say when

confronted by government soldiers who ask them why they have sheltered guerrillas.

In general, it is not true. There are judicious uses of terror, no doubt, but no guerrilla can afford to use it against the people on whose support and confidence he depends for his life as well as for his political existence. People are quick to detect the difference between opportunism and dedication, and it is the latter that they respect and follow.

To be successful, the guerrilla must be loved and admired. To attract followers, he must represent not merely success, but absolute virtue, so that his enemy will represent absolute evil. If the soldiers are idle, drunken, and licentious, the guerrilla must be vigorous, sober, and moral. If enemies are to be disposed of, it must be for moral reasons: they must be traitors, murderers, rapists. The revolution must show that its justice is sure and swift. By contrast, its enemies must be revealed as venal, weak, and vacillating.

The successful guerrilla leader must be fair in his dealings, paying for the goods he takes, and respecting personal property and individual rights, even those of persons not partisan to his cause, in the realisation that the society in which he works is an intricate and interlocking machinery and that he requires all the support he can get. Even where the war is at bottom a class struggle – and this is not always the case – class rivalries should be softened rather than sharpened, subordinated to a transcendental, national cause. Those in doubt, even the adherents and servants of the regime, must be given a clear moral choice. They must be told, in effect: It is still not too late to join forces with virtue, and to have a share in the bright future, more secure and certain than the property or the position you value now.

Revolutionary propaganda must be essentially *true* in order to be believed. This is simple expedience. If it is not believed, people cannot be induced to act on it, and there will be no revolution. Guerrilla leaders do not inspire the spirit of sacrifice and revolutionary will that creates popular insurrection by promises alone, or by guns alone. A high degree of selfless dedication and high purpose is required. Whether the primary cause of revolution is nationalism, or social justice, or the anticipation of material progress, the decision to fight and to sacrifice is a social and a moral decision. Insurgency is thus a matter not of manipulation but of inspiration.

I am aware that such conclusions are not compatible with the picture of guerrilla operations and guerrilla motivation drawn by the counter-insurgency theorists who are so much in vogue today.

But the counter-insurgency experts have yet to win a war. At this writing, they are certainly losing one.

Their picture is distorted because their premises are false and their observation faulty. They assume – perhaps their commitments require them to assume – that politics is mainly a manipulative science and insurgency mainly a politico-military technique to be countered by some other technique; whereas both are forms of social behaviour, the latter being the mode of popular resistance to unpopular governments.